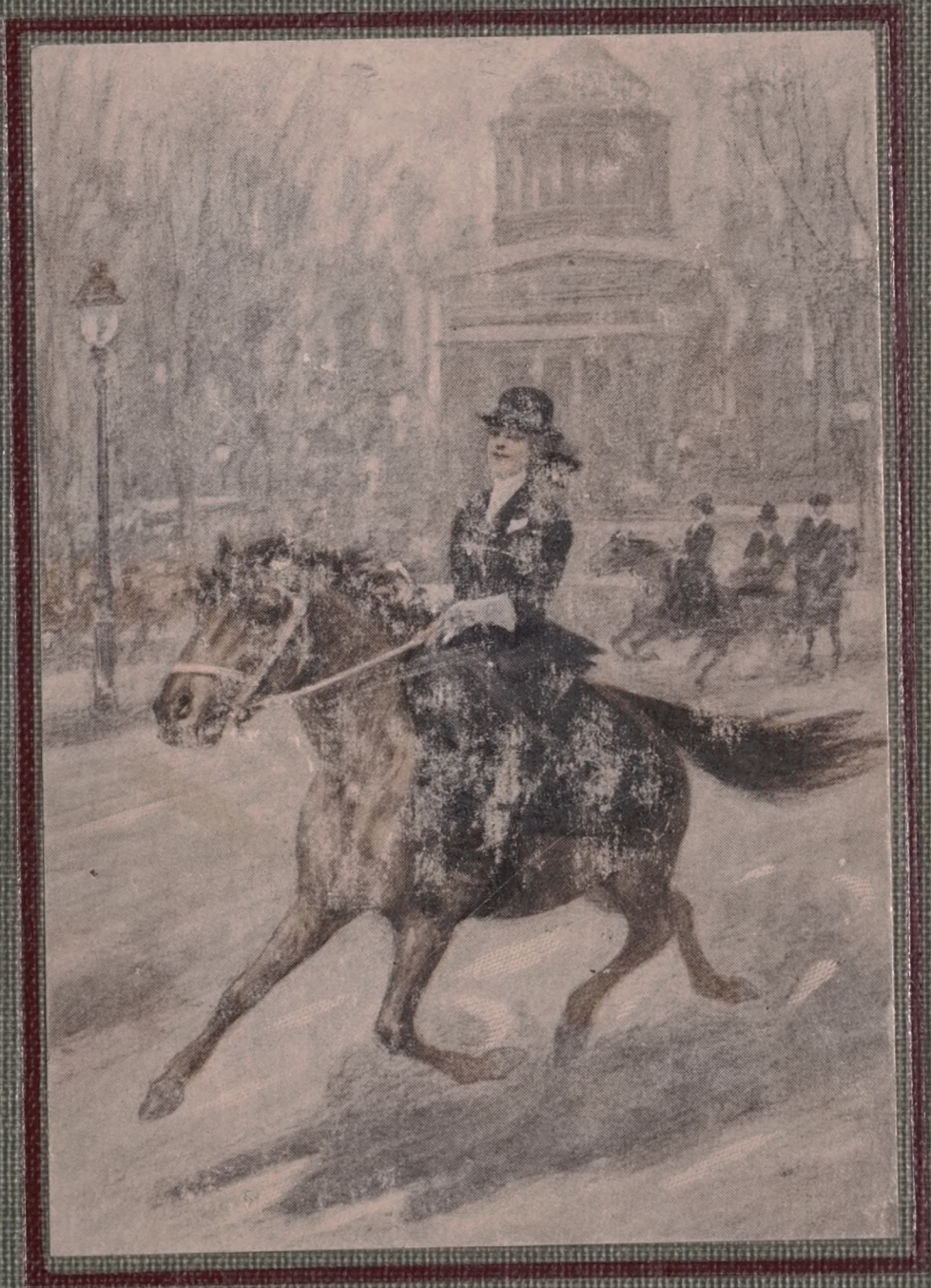


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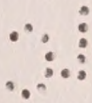
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BETH'S WONDER-WINTER



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Dedicated
to
Little Frances
with great love

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Beth's Wonder-Winter

CHAPTER I

WHEN THE MAIL CAME IN

"**B**ETH BRISTEAD, did you tear—how did you tear your apron so?" demanded Beth's aunt. She held up the accusing rent to explain the change in the form of her question; it left no room for doubt that the apron was torn.

Beth, small and quiet for her eleven years, answered unexpectedly:

"I didn't tear it, Aunt Rebecca. It tore itself—kind of."

"Kind of! Elizabeth Frances, aprons do not tear themselves, and you have always been perfectly truthful—I brought you up so," said Aunt Rebecca sternly.

"Yes'm," said Beth, flushing all over her sweet little round face. "I'll tell you," she began, forced to explain by her habit of obedience and her truthful upbringing, "I took it off and hung it on the low boughs of the tree when I climbed it—it was the apple tree, the old Baldwin apple tree down by the well we never use. And when I came down I was in a hurry, so I guess I took it off snatchified, because it caught and

tore. I suppose if I'd have been slower I'd have felt the caught place and unhooked it, but—it just slit.”

“It looks as if it did! You'll have to mend it neatly, put a patch under it and fasten the frayed edges before you sew. What were you doing up in an apple tree, a great girl like you?” said Aunt Rebecca.

“Oh, dear! must I mend it? It's a three-cornered tear!” sighed Beth. “I s'pose I ought, because it's my apron—though I'm sure I never wanted it.”

“It's your tear, too,” observed Beth's aunt dryly. “You haven't told me what you were doing up in the apple tree, nor why you had to take off your apron when you climbed.”

Beth looked around the familiar room and glanced appealingly down at the worn carpet footstool. Then she looked higher, at the big rocking-chair with the cushion tied on its back, the cushion that always went flip-flap above Beth's head when she sat in that chair, because she was not quite tall enough to lean against it. Then her eyes rose to the narrow mantelpiece above the resolute stove, faithful to its office, but hideous to look upon. She looked at the blue vase with the pink roses, at the pink vase with the yellow chrysanthemums on it which stood, a pair, yet not matching, one on each end of the shelf. She looked at the clock that stood in the middle, with Time and his scythe reclining on its top, at the chubby china boy with a muffler around his throat and a match box on his back, and at the china lamb, which flanked the clock on either side, but none of these lifelong friends gave Beth any sugges-

tion for her explanation. There was nothing to do but explain without help, though she knew that Aunt Rebecca would not understand.

"I climbed the tree, Aunt Rebecca, because I was playing 'Watchman, tell us of the night,'" Beth said slowly. "I was the Watchman and Shep was the Traveler-o'er-yon-mountain-height—there wasn't anybody else to be it—don't you see?"

"I certainly do not see," said Aunt Rebecca in a tone which implied that her not seeing was much to Beth's discredit. "That is a hymn, not a game, and what can it have to do with climbing trees?"

"I was the Watchman," explained Beth patiently. "I had to climb a tree, or something, to get up high enough to be him. Don't you know what it says, Aunt Rebecca? I saw a picture once like it; the watchman is up in a high thing, like a square steeple, walking back and forth—I couldn't walk back and forth in a tree, but it was the highest thing I had. Don't you know, Aunt Rebecca?"

"I knew that hymn and many another long before I was your age, Beth; I took the Sabbath school prize for the greatest number of hymns, as well as the greatest number of Bible verses committed to memory, when I was not quite ten," said Aunt Rebecca with a sort of humble pride. "But I fail to see why you took off your apron, even if you were turning that hymn into a game—and it never occurred to *me* when *I* was a little girl to do such a thing as that."

"You couldn't possibly be a Watchman telling us of

the night with a great, long blue gingham apron on, Aunt Rebecca!" said Beth earnestly, though hopelessly.

"Then I advise you to play something else," said Aunt Rebecca. "Now you will have to mend your apron, and most likely it will take so much of your playtime to do it that you won't play anything tomorrow."

"Aunt Rebecca," Beth burst out with a vehemence unlike her subdued little self, a vehemence that crimsoned her face to her straight light hair, brushed tightly back and braided beyond all chance of a lock escaping into disorder, "Aunt Rebecca, I hate aprons!"

"Do you?" remarked her aunt. "Well, they're fitting and proper for you to wear, none the less. You'll find that there are a great many things that are good for you which you may not like."

"I've found it out already," sighed Beth. "I found it out when I was young, but I knew it 'way down in my stomach last summer when I was sick and the doctor left me medicine. But aprons are not good for me; they're only good for my dresses, and I really don't see what's the use of dresses when they're always covered up in aprons. When they come out of aprons they're always outgrown, and you give 'em to Emmy Jackson. My Sunday dress is the only one that has the least, wee chance to show. I think aprons are cruel—that is they are if your dress is pretty. Sometimes to get along with it at all, I have to play that my dress is a princess and my apron a wicked fairy smothering her."

“All good little girls wear aprons,” said Aunt Rebecca somewhat at a loss how to answer Beth’s remarks, which were prompted entirely by a sincere desire to let light into her aunt’s mind, and not in the least by the spirit of disobedience, or a desire to rebel against the order of things as they were, including aprons.

“Oh, no, Aunt Rebecca,” said Beth eagerly. She took the worn footstool and sat down upon it, folding her hands to discuss the matter thoroughly. “That isn’t a contradicting contradiction ; I just mean—well, I mean *no* ; all good little girls do not wear aprons, truly. I have seen pictures and read stories of little girls that were as good as they were lovely—you could see it in the pictures, and the stories always told you so—who never wore aprons at all. In the stories you often read exactly what the girls wear, and they are perfectly be-au-ti-ful dresses, but not a single apron. If they wore aprons the story would sometimes say : ‘Reaching her arm up ’most out of joint she buttoned her apron as she went down-stairs.’ Or, maybe : ‘Her mother called her down to see the minister, and she pulled off her apron to be fit to be seen.’ But they never say anything except something about her throwing her hat off, or pulling off her coat, or putting on her gloves, or something nice—never a single apron in a story. And it’s the same in pictures. I don’t know a picture of a girl in an apron. And in the fashion books you never see a girl in an apron. They are always all fluffy and sweet, but they don’t cover it up.

And these books say they are 'Styles for Girls of Eight to Twelve.' That means they show what girls wear, doesn't it? And not an apron!" Beth's voice rose triumphant. "If you could wait, Aunt Rebecca, I'd get some of the books Miss Tappan left when she sewed here last week, and show you."

"Never mind," said Aunt Rebecca. "Those are stories and fashions for children who don't live as you do. Their lot is not your lot."

"Oh," sighed Beth.

It was a saddening sort of an explanation, but it seemed to cover the ground. She had received this answer, or something like it, a great many times when she showed signs of discontent. This did not happen often, for Beth was a contented little soul, naturally good and docile. Sometimes, but not often, she wistfully wondered what it would be to have life more flowery, so to speak; she wondered if mothers made things brighter. Aunt Rebecca—her great-aunt—had brought her up kindly; Beth was grateful, but Aunt Rebecca had not a mind that considered the merely ornamental, the merely pleasant things, worth cultivating. And Beth loved pretty things, and joyous things like a sweet-loving humming-bird; she was like a little humming-bird, flying about in a stony place.

"Some people's lot is to be like the lilies of the field, or the butterflies," said Aunt Rebecca severely. "They live careless, gay lives, spending a great deal, and never considering. You should be glad, Elizabeth, that your lot is different."

“My lot is a lot of aprons,” said Beth. “Do you think butterflies can help it, Aunt Rebecca?” Then, without waiting to make clear her not-particularly clear question, Beth hurried on. “Sometimes, Aunt Rebecca, I like to make believe that everything happens wonderfully. I make believe we are rich, as rich as Greasers ——”

“Croesus, child,” corrected Aunt Rebecca with a short laugh.

“Oh,” said Beth. “And we can have everything on earth we want—only I don’t know just what you would like, Aunt Rebecca, to have a perfectly glorious time. So I always just hurry over that, making believe you can have every single thing you want, so you can decide that yourself, and I can go on making believe for myself, without worrying about you. And, my goodness, what don’t I have! Dresses—oceans of them, and I wear the splndidest ones every day, and don’t mind at all whether they fade, or get spotted, or what happens! And I live in a palace, and hardly walk at all, just order the horses, you know, and go! And I travel, and I eat such lovely things that ice-cream isn’t worth talking about, and I smell flowers all the time, because I have acres of them, even in winter, and—— Oh, mercy! It’s a beautiful make-believe, but there isn’t much danger of its coming true. There aren’t any fairies nowadays; I guess there never were any in New England, and it would take fairies and fairies to bring it true! Do you think it’s a lovely make-believe, Aunt Rebecca?”

"No. I think it's very bad for you to let yourself covet luxury that isn't possible for you to have, Beth," said Aunt Rebecca. "You will grow up a discontented, envious woman if you allow your mind to dwell on riches which can never be yours."

"It doesn't make me feel wicked, Aunt Rebecca," said Beth slowly. "It is like a great secret garden where I go to play. It's fairy-land; there aren't such lovely things anywhere as I make believe I have, so I don't think it makes me wicked, Aunt Rebecca. It's just dream things. Of course I know I'll never see them, so I don't think of them that way."

Now this is a workaday world, and Beth was quite right in saying that there are not fairies, at least not at work on many mortal lives, but this is what happened just as the little girl ended with a wistful, yet happy sigh.

Lydia Tappan, the village dressmaker, came up the street, and in her hand she held a letter. She turned in at Aunt Rebecca's gate and walked up the flagged walk, and opened the door in the simple fashion of the place, without the ceremony of knocking. She entered the sitting-room before Beth could get up from her footstool, as she hastened to do, like the polite child that she was, respectful to her elders.

"I was down to mail a letter, Rebecca," said Miss Tappan, "and I thought I'd bring up your mail. You've got a letter from New York; I wasn't aware you knew anybody there."

Aunt Rebecca took the letter, opened it and began

to read. "Mercy upon us!" she murmured, turning over the sheet to see the signature. Then she went back to the beginning and read steadily on to the end. Beth thought that she had never seen Aunt Rebecca look so excited as she did when she let the letter fall into her lap at last, and sat staring at the little girl.

"Well?" hinted Miss Tappan impatiently, eager to be let into the mystery.

"It's from Beth's mother's brother," said Aunt Rebecca.

"Isn't that an uncle?" cried Beth instantly sharing Aunt Rebecca's excitement.

"Well?" repeated Miss Tappan.

"He is James Cortlandt; he is worth millions," Aunt Rebecca went on, ignoring Beth. "He has a family of three children, two girls and a boy. This letter is from him and his wife. They want I should let Beth go on to them to spend the winter. They say they want to know their sister Nannie's child and want her cousins to know her. I don't know what to think, Lydia. Of course they have everything heart could wish, but I don't know them, and I don't want Beth to be spoiled. It's the thin edge of the wedge, Lydia."

"You couldn't spoil Beth so easy," said Miss Tappan. Neither woman seemed to remember that the small person they were discussing was waiting, wide-eyed and marveling, for what should come next. "They make a good deal of Beth here, in school, everywhere, and she's always the same sensible, steady, old-fashioned little soul. She'd take the splendor just as she takes

everything, with a pleasant, obliging smile, and be happy in it, just as she's happy when folks here are good to her. I guess I'd risk it. Besides, you don't seem to me to have the right to keep her from getting acquainted with her mother's folks, if they want her. It will be a great advantage to her to see the world."

"H'm! That's as it may be," said Aunt Rebecca. "There's some sides of the world better unseen."

"The world's round, Rebecca; it hasn't any sides. To fit it you've got to be sort of rounded yourself. I always felt it was a pity we stayed so close right here all our lives. How'll you get Beth there?" asked Miss Tappan. She knew Aunt Rebecca well enough to see that she had decided that Beth was to go.

"They'll send a maid on here to fetch her, if I say she may go," said Aunt Rebecca. "Do you understand what's happened, child?" she added, turning to Beth. "Your Uncle Cortlandt, in New York, has asked you on to visit him for this winter. Do you want to go?"

Beth ran over and threw her arms around Aunt Rebecca. To her surprise her aunt's arms closed around her plump little figure uncomfortably tight; Aunt Rebecca was not given to embraces.

"It would be lonely, Aunt Rebecca; I'm afraid I'd be homesick often. But one winter isn't long when it's so near Christmas already—only seven weeks off! And if I was dreadfully homesick I suppose they'd let me come home. Don't you think it must be wonderful in New York? Miss Bradley was there on her trip last

summer; she told us about it in school. They have so many things, railroads in the air, and railroads down under the ground, and ferry-boats, and big churches, and parks of wild animals, and statues, and fishes in places where they keep them—all kinds, and buildings so high you get a crick in your neck looking up at them. Miss Bradley said we were to remember it was next biggest to London. Janie and I were crazy to go when Miss Bradley told our class about it. I think, even if I was a little homesick, I'd just love to go, Aunt Rebecca, if you don't mind," said truthful Beth.

"Well, I suppose you have to go; I don't suppose what I want has anything to do with it, nor homesickness either," said Aunt Rebecca crisply. "I shall write and tell them to come after you on—let me see!—say the twentieth; that will be in about ten days from the time they get my letter. Your aunt says she prefers to buy your winter clothes there; I suppose she thinks you wouldn't be fitted out here the way her children are; neither would you. I guess you'll be one of those children you were talking about, who don't wear aprons, this winter, Beth," Aunt Rebecca ended with a laugh that did not sound amused.

"I'll wear them if you want me to just the same as if I was home!" cried Beth catching the note of regret in her great-aunt's voice and generously responding to it. Then the magnificence of what had happened rushed over the little girl, almost overwhelming her. "Oh, it has come true, it has come true! And I thought it never could!" she cried. "It will be my

make-believe land, and I'll be in it, alive, really me, just Beth Bristead! Oh, I'll write you, Aunt Rebecca, I truly will, though I de-spise writing, so you sha'n't miss me! And I'll come back so good you will be thankful, and I'll remember everything you ever told me to do, and I won't forget a single thing I see, so I'll be better than newspapers next summer. Oh, Aunt Rebecca, to think such a little while ago when I was telling you about it we never thought it could come true, and now it has, it has! May I go right away and tell Janie Little that I'm going? What will she say! What will all the girls say! Oh, Aunt Rebecca, I think I'll never live to get to New York, I'm so glad. It will be a wonder-winter!"

Beth flew off to get her hat. Aunt Rebecca and Miss Tappan heard the front door slam and looked out of the window. They saw Beth wildly struggling into her jacket as she tore off down the street to find her best beloved playmate and tell her the great good fortune that had befallen her. They knew that the child trod upon air, that it seemed to her that fairies were speeding her flying feet, showering upon her gifts beyond belief. They were glad in her joy, but Aunt Rebecca knew that she would sorely miss her little Beth.

CHAPTER II

WHEN THE TRAIN PULLED OUT

BETH sat by the window in spotless order. Her hands were clasped in her lap; she was so still that her favorite doll, sitting stiffly opposite to her, seemed, by contrast, to be romping. But the reddened tips of the clasped fingers betrayed the severe pressure that held them so motionless, and the pallor of the usually rosy round face, and the dilated blackness of the blue eyes told the effort which kept the little girl so quiet at her post. Beth was watching for the arrival of her Aunt Alida Cortlandt's maid, who was to carry her off to the crowded metropolis. Beth had never seen a maid—she had seen “girls,” “help,” even “servants,” but a maid! Somehow she had gathered from her beloved story-books vague ideas of maids as exalted persons who beautifully served beautiful princesses, or noble ladies. The coming of one of these to the brown village house which had been Aunt Rebecca's home for more than fifty years, and Beth's home for a fifth of that time was the beginning of the wonderful experiences into which the maid would lead the little girl.

Outside in the hall stood Beth's small trunk, locked and strapped, and plainly tagged in Aunt Rebecca's clear handwriting. The knowledge that it was there made it harder for Beth to watch quietly out of the

window. Aunt Rebecca had rebelled against Mrs. Cortlandt's suggestion that Beth should be fitted out with winter clothing in New York. Aunt Rebecca "guessed that her nephew's daughter wasn't going to visit her mother's folks as if she hadn't had a friend in the world till they remembered to ask her!" She had prepared what seemed to Beth a lavish wardrobe, and had packed it in the little trunk that Beth had always admired as it stood in the attic under the eaves. Miss Tappan had made the navy blue coat and gown to match which Beth wore then, ready to travel in. She liked it so much that she was glad that it had three tucks in the skirt, so that if New York air made her grow fast the skirt could be let down three tucks' length, and she could wear her new suit all winter. It had a hat to match; a round navy blue felt, trimmed with navy blue ribbon that was not precisely the same shade as the hat, but was the nearest to it of all the ribbons Miss Ludd, the milliner, had. It also had a bunch of blue quills that caused Beth delightful anxiety, because of their tendency to split at their tips when she put her hat into its box.

A public carriage drove up the street and stopped at the Bristead door. Beth drew a quick, gasping, inward breath.

"Aunt Rebecca," she said low, but with an intensity that made her voice perfectly audible in the next room where her great-aunt was cutting out work for the sewing society, "Aunt Rebecca, she has come! Oh, is that a maid?" she added.

For Beth saw a tall person descend from the carriage, pay the driver and turn toward the house. She was clad in taffeta so shining that she looked like a perfectly new, very good quality of stove-pipe; the gown fell around her in such unwrinkled stiffness that it increased the stove-pipe likeness. Her hair was black, so smooth and solid in effect that it carried out the suggestion of her being made of sheet iron. She moved with great dignity, and looked the brown house up and down with an air so superior that Beth felt a sudden fear of her. She could not have told what she had expected a lady's maid to be like, but certainly not like this alarming person.

Ella Lowndes, who was Aunt Rebecca's "help," opened the door.

"Come in," Beth heard her say. "Miss Bristead's in, yes, and the little girl is all ready to start away with you."

"You'd better lay off your things," Beth heard Aunt Rebecca saying. "I'll see that you have luncheon right away. This is Elizabeth Bristead, Mr. Cortlandt's niece, who is going back with you," she added as Beth came shyly forth from her observation post by the window.

"How do you do, Miss Elizabeth?" said the maid with an unexpected touch of Irish in her speech. Beth had never known any one with that accent who was not jolly, and the maid looked more serious—and older—at close range than when she had come up the walk. "No, Miss Bristead, thank you, I don't care about any luncheon," she went on. "I came right out here from

Boston—I was over night there—and if you don't mind there's a train back at half-past eleven I'd like to be takin'. Then we'd catch the mid-afternoon New York express to New York, and be gettin' there early in the evenin'. I don't want to be hurryin' you, but if Miss Elizabeth is really ready—Mrs. Cortlandt asked me to make the best time I could; she'll be missin' me if I'm gone a second night from her. They was goin' to send up the motor car for me to bring the young lady on in it, but Mr. Cortlandt ran down to Lakewood to a speed thril his club has to-day. He took the small car, but he wouldn't let any shoffer but Mr. Léon Charette run it for 'um, and there's no other he would thrust to bring the big car up here after the little girl, so I took the train."

Aunt Rebecca almost gasped, Beth actually gasped; Aunt Rebecca because this torrent of words overwhelmed her; Beth because she had no idea what these words were all about. If the maid had said "chauffeur" instead of "shoffer" Beth would still have been in the dark as to her unknown uncle's reasons for letting his niece come to him by train.

"Beth's trunk is all ready; there isn't a thing to do but get her coat and hat on," said Aunt Rebecca. "It seems ridiculous to come all the way from New York and turn right around without so much as a cup of tea, but if you're in such a hurry—I suppose Shakespeare knew when he said what had to be done might as well be done quickly. Beth, get your things."

"Now, Aunt Rebecca?" cried Beth. But she de-

parted on her errand instantly, and returned with her hat on backward above a face purple from all sorts of emotions which there was no time to sort out, unrolling her cashmere gloves as she came.

"You don't seem to have looked in the glass," commented Aunt Rebecca as she took off the excited child's hat and righted it. "Here, I'll hold your coat; pull your sleeves down first." She lifted Beth's coat over her shoulders with such vigor that Beth herself was raised on her tiptoes. "There'll have to be somebody get her trunk down to the depot so's it'll go on the train with you," said Aunt Rebecca. "Oh, you kept the carriage!" she added, glancing out of the window. "Then I don't see but that you're ready to go on your travels, Beth."

"Mrs. Cortlandt said I was to be sure and tell you not to send anything whatever for the child to wear, Miss Bristead," said the maid rising.

"I've provided for my grandniece all her life so far," said Aunt Rebecca decidedly, "and when she starts she'll go as I send her, which is properly clad and made comfortable. When she's in Mrs. Cortlandt's house she'll wear exactly what that lady considers proper, same's she wore here what I considered proper, but she's going from home with all a well brought up little girl requires. I shall do my part, and Miss Beth's trunk goes with Miss Beth."

Beth marveled at Aunt Rebecca's courage, and at her knowledge of the way to address a maid; she quite glowed with pride in her.

The maid drew herself up stiffly, but she said kindly : "I'm sure I've no objections, madam, to whatever you like to send ; it's only the matter of a baggage check in me pocketbook to me, and it's natural the way you feel."

She considerably preceded Beth out of the room, her silken skirts rustling more than any skirts of Beth's acquaintance as she went. But Aunt Rebecca had no farewell to take privately.

"Be a good child," she said, "and remember all you've been taught. Have a good time, but see to it that it is a *good* time—don't you be naughty. And no matter where you go, nor what you see, don't you lose hold of your good Bristead principles. Speak the truth, be obedient, first to what you know is right, and secondly to those who are placed over you, and mind your manners. Then in New York, or up here among the Massachusetts hills, or wherever you find yourself, you'll find you're fit to be there, and you'll always come out right whatever befalls you. Good-bye."

She kissed Beth sincerely, but with no more display of emotion than she would have shown on ordinary occasions, if on ordinary occasions Aunt Rebecca ever kissed.

Beth threw her arms around Aunt Rebecca and kissed her again and again with the full consciousness that this was a crisis, an era in her life, upon which no calm embrace would be suitable.

"I'll be as good, as good as goodness, Aunt Rebecca ! And I'll be dreadfully homesick and lonely without



"OH ! GOOD-BYE, AUNT REBECCA."

you, but I know I shall have a beautiful time. Please don't let Tabby forget me, and if she should have an all yellow kitten while I'm gone, you will keep it for me, won't you? Oh, good-bye, Aunt Rebecca," Beth cried with a last frantic hug and desperate kiss. Then she ran out of the door laughing and crying, darted back to bid Ella Lowndes good-bye, finally rushed down the walk and into the station carriage. The driver leaned over and shut the door, turned his horse, guiding him with the reins laid over Beth's trunk on end beside him, and drove down the street.

Beth watched the familiar buildings drop back of her with a puzzled sense of being in a dream. Except for a trip to Boston for a day she had never been away from the world these buildings represented; the Centre Church, the small shops, the new hall, the brick school-house, the library. New York would certainly be different from this; Boston was different, and Beth knew to a figure how much smaller than New York Boston was.

The maid did not talk; Beth glanced at her uneasily. She had no idea how to address her, and she looked capable of resenting the wrong form of address. Beth decided to wait for her to begin the conversation; she was so unexpectedly elderly that that was surely her right.

The maid bought Beth's ticket, checked her trunk for Boston, and that left little time to spare before the train came. Beth mounted the steps with rapidly beating heart and flutteringly took the inside seat by the window which the maid indicated.

"You've been to Boston, it's likely, Miss Elizabeth?" said the maid at last to Beth's relief.

"Yes, several times," said Beth. "But I've never traveled anywhere else. Have you traveled much?"

"I came across the ocean when I wasn't much above your age. I've traveled pretty much all over America with different ladies, and I've been much about Europe, Miss Elizabeth," said the maid indifferently.

"Oh, my! Have you?" cried Beth. "I'm not Miss Elizabeth, please. Aunt Rebecca doesn't call me Elizabeth unless she's displeased with me, and nobody else ever does. I'm Beth."

"You'll have to be called Miss Beth then, for it's not suitable for your uncle's servants to call you by your name, so free," said the maid.

"Isn't it?" asked Beth. "Of course I don't know as well as you do. Ella always calls me Beth, but she's just Ella. What ought I to call you, please?"

"Anna Mary. I was a twin, and they named me twin sister the same name, only the other way about: she was Mary Anna," replied the maid.

"How interesting!" cried Beth. "It's not a long ride to Boston, is it? Not half as long as it sounds when you say you're going there."

"And a good thing it isn't, for there's no Pullman car on this train, and it's tiresome," returned Anna Mary.

Beth subsided. She did not know what a Pullman car was; it oppressed her to know that Anna Mary was finding this delightful trip tiresome.

They arrived in Boston early. Anna Mary took Beth for a light lunch in the station restaurant, explaining that they would have a good dinner on the train to New York. But the lightness of Beth's lunch proved weighted by her healthy appetite; she ate an excellent lunch, though Anna Mary condemned everything they had, scornfully.

They crossed the city to the other station from which they were to start for New York. Anna Mary bought Beth's ticket and two seats in the Pullman car, and looked after Beth's trunk competently. As soon as the express for New York was made up Beth and Anna Mary boarded it. Beth followed her tall guide through the vestibule entrance to a car like nothing in her previous limited experience of travel. All inlaid in various beautiful woods was this car, fitted with heavy shades, hung with curtains at its wide plate glass windows. It was carpeted in soundless velvet carpeting and furnished with great swinging chairs, upholstered in green velvet. Velvet cushions waited tired travelers' feet before willow chairs, velvet cushioned also, which sat at the ends of this car, and long, narrow mirrors between the windows gave back the smiles in a pair of happy eyes to Beth as she followed the colored porter down the aisle. He preceded them, carrying Anna Mary's coat which she had promptly handed him, and led the way to the seats whose numbers she gave him, recorded on the checks which she had purchased in the station. Anna Mary had increased in awfulness since she had stepped on the lowest step of the car. The

porter eagerly established her in her chair, hung up her coat, and seemed relieved that she expressed herself satisfied with the location of her chairs.

Beth climbed into her own great chair; it was only too comfortable; she was almost lost in its hollow, and its depth of seat prevented her feet from reaching the floor. But the observant porter quickly brought a velvet cushion for both Anna Mary and Beth, and the little girl settled back into luxury that showed her why Anna Mary had called the car in which they had begun their journey "tiresome."

Anna Mary bought three magazines for Beth and a bunch of violets, and finally a box of chocolates from a succession of boys that passed through the car. Beth could not help knowing that Anna Mary spent more than two dollars on these gifts. It was such a great sum to expend so recklessly on her small self that Beth was almost as much troubled as pleased by such extravagance. She conveyed her feeling to Anna Mary. The maid laughed.

"All ladies have such thrifles in travelin', Miss Beth. You'll have to get used to more than that, my dear," she said.

Beth tasted the chocolates thoughtfully. It was true, then, the unlikely things she had read in stories, of girls who thought no more of two pound boxes of candy, nor thought as much of them, as Beth thought of buying a quarter of a pound of cough drops in a white, scalloped edged bag at Armstrong's, the druggist's, at home!

The train proved to be a fast one; Beth had never ridden so fast. They whirled past landscapes that were shaken down into a confusing whole made up of trees, fences, hills, river, ponds and towns on a grayish-yellow November background, much as Mr. Armstrong shook together the ingredients of a prescription in a bottle.

Beth kept swinging around in her chair at first to talk to Anna Mary, but Anna Mary was plainly not inclined to conversation. She fell asleep as soon as Beth discovered this fact, and let her alone; the little girl happily resigned herself to looking out of the window, to turning the pages of her magazines, to watching the other passengers, and at last to enjoying the wonder of the great thought that she, Beth Bristead, was rushing toward New York at a fearful, yet safe speed, in such a beautiful car that it hardly seemed possible the great city held anything finer.

It was growing dusk when Anna Mary awoke with a start. She smiled at Beth with great kindness and approval. "Well, you are a good child, whatever else you may be!" she said. "I think I lost meself a few minyutes. Now, we're goin' to have our dinner. It's early, but we'll take our time at it, and be nicely back here for a while before we get into town."

She arose and Beth followed her. "Leave your hat and coat here, Miss Beth; there'll nobody touch 'em," Anna Mary said, and Beth rather anxiously obeyed.

Anna Mary led the way from that car to the next one. It was entered by a passage that turned sharply

around a corner, shutting off the second car from first sight. When they came around this corner Beth exclaimed rapturously. There was a brilliantly lighted dining-room awaiting them, more brilliant and gay than any Beth had ever seen. Small tables, snowy white as to covers, glittering with clear glass and even with flowers on them, stood before each window. Colored waiters in white linen, matching their gleaming teeth, but contrasting strikingly with their complexions, stood about, or flew around, napkins on arm, trays in hand, serving those already seated at the tables, waiting for others who were to come—among them Anna Mary and delighted Beth.

"I hope you are hungry, Miss Beth," said Anna Mary taking off her gloves as she and Beth took the chairs an eager waiter had pulled back for them.

"I really am," said Beth surprised to find it true. "I don't see how I can be, so soon, and I've been eating chocolates, too, but I really am."

"Will you pick out what you want, or will I order for you?" suggested Anna Mary.

"Oh, you, please," cried Beth, and Anna Mary ordered. She proved to be an excellent judge of a good dinner. Beth wondered if she thought it was Thanksgiving that day, instead of next week. Oysters, soup, lobster, broiled chicken, several unfamiliar but delicious vegetables, salad—which Beth did not like—ice-cream and fancy cakes, which Beth decidedly did like—and a second order of it, at that!—coffee for Anna Mary, weak tea for Beth, to whom it was a dissipation. All

this Anna Mary ordered as if it was a matter of course, and partook of critically.

Beth leaned back in her chair at last and sighed, then laughed.

"I was thinking that it seemed as if that sigh could hardly get out, I had eaten such a big, such a very big dinner," she explained. "Anna Mary, I never had such a wonderful dinner! I think Cinderella couldn't have had a better one if you had been the fairy godmother."

This was not what Beth meant to say, but Anna Mary understood her meaning. "You will soon see real dinners," she said, implying that this was "about like a box of crackers," thought Beth, stunned by the prospect before her, and watching Anna Mary as she unrolled a large bill from the fat wad in her pocket-book and handed it to the waiter. She watched with greater awe as the waiter offered Anna Mary her change on a small silver tray and Anna Mary gathered it up, leaving half a dollar, a whole shining fifty cent piece, on the tray for the waiter to take. This he did with a bow of profound respect.

"Anna Mary," began Beth after they had returned to their chairs in the drawing-room car, "is it really like this, only more than this, in New York?"

"It's a great town, Miss Beth," said Anna Mary. "There's folks in it, like your uncle, who live like princes of the blood, going from glory to glory. And there's many more comfortable by hard workin', and there's more than there should be livin' not much better than in ash barrels, like the poor homeless cats

you do be seein' after dark. But for the most part, yes; it's like this, only more so. And you might be puttin' on your hat now, Miss Beth, for we're gettin' in."

The train slowed up, stopped. Anna Mary took Beth's hand and led her, bewildered, not sure whether she were awake or dreaming, down a long, cold concrete avenue between tracks, through hurrying crowds, under electric lights, into a screaming, rushing, roaring street of cabmen, travelers, trolleys. This was New York!

Anna Mary put Beth into an electric cab, gave an address, and stepped in herself. The doors that shut them in like a sort of folding lid closed upon them and the cab started. Never before had Beth ridden in a vehicle running without a track, without visible power to propel it. She held her breath.

The cab skidded along through the crowded cross street, turned a corner sharply, swung into a broad avenue alive with other electric cabs, horse-drawn cabs, fine carriages, two-story green stages with winding stairs up their backs, but with no horses to draw them; past streams of people going both ways, bright-faced girls, men in queer high hats that looked like mourning to Beth, with swinging coats that showed shining white linen, or black silk mufflers. She caught glimpses of lovely ladies in carriages, hatless, with flowers or feathers in their hair, gleaming with jewels as their beautiful cloaks parted, gowned in silks of the most exquisite tints. She saw others, walking, with lace

mantillas over their hair, like the Spanish ladies in her geography, and with long coats that showed only beautiful ruffles as their wearers held up skirts and hurried to the theatre. She passed tall houses, some of them dark and solemn, some all alight, with pictures, great chairs, all sorts of brilliance, revealed through their lace-draped windows.

“ Oh, am I really, really here? Am I seeing it, truly, Anna Mary? ” gasped Beth.

Anna Mary caught her meaning. “ You’re awake, Miss Beth ; it’s New York fast enough,” she said with the pride of an adopted citizen in the vast, splendid city.

CHAPTER III

THE CHANGELING

THE cab stopped before a tall house, dressed in brown from head to foot. "It looks like Aunt Rebecca when she has on her brown mohair," thought Beth, and the humorous resemblance cheered away a slight feeling of fear that crept over the little girl as she realized that she had come to stay long in this big brown stone house, so unlike the brown house in the village from which she had come.

The cab doors parted and swung back without a touch. It was magic, Beth thought, till she remembered the driver somewhere up aloft behind her.

Anna Mary delayed long enough to pay this lofty personage, who touched his tall hat in acknowledgment of his fee; Beth watched it all with wide eyes as she waited on the pavement.

"Now," said Anna Mary, and Beth followed her up the steps.

A smiling young woman in a cap opened the door. "Oh, Anna Mary!" she said, but her eyes were on Beth in her home-made blue garments.

"Where's Mrs. Hodgman?" asked Anna Mary resenting this maid's unspoken criticism of Beth's appearance. Anna Mary had a personal pride in everything

and everybody belonging to the family which she served.

"Mrs. Hodgman is in her room down-stairs," said the maid. Just then a serious looking woman came up from below, and Anna Mary went toward her.

"Mrs. Hodgman, this is Mr. Cortlandt's niece, Miss Elizabeth Bristead, but she is called Miss Beth. I've this moment come back from fetchin' her. Miss Beth, this is Mrs. Hodgman who looks after your aunt's house-keepin' for her," said Anna Mary.

Puzzled Beth held out her hand. "I'm very well, thank you," she said, before Mrs. Hodgman had a chance to ask after her health.

The housekeeper smiled. "I'm glad to hear it, my dear. You certainly look so," she said. "Mrs. Cortlandt and Mr. Cortlandt are out, Anna Mary. Mrs. Cortlandt thought that you would come, but she wasn't sure, because you forgot to telegraph. She left word that she should not be in before one, if she came as early as that, and if the little niece came that we were to make her comfortable. She said that you could stay with Miss Beth until she came home, for fear she might be lonely. She said you need do nothing in her room till she came, but stay up-stairs to make the child happy."

"I suppose her room is ready?" asked Anna Mary. "I think she had better not meet her cousins to-night. Miss Beth, come and have supper, and then we'll go up-stairs."

"I don't think I'm hungry," said Beth cautiously,

remembering how her appetite on the train had surprised her.

But Anna Mary did not wait for her to make sure ; she led the way down the hall. "She'd better have supper in the breakfast room, don't you think, Mrs. Hodgman ? It's more cozy," she suggested.

Anna Mary pulled aside a heavy portière and touched a button. The light that leaped into the flower-shaped bulbs around the room revealed rose-colored silken covered walls, high wainscoting of a wood as fine and glossy as the silk above it, beautiful gold and rose window draperies, and furniture so fine that even Beth felt its perfection. She caught her breath.

"Is it a room, a room to use ?" she cried.

"It's the breakfast room, Miss Beth," said the housekeeper. "It is said to be one of the most beautiful rooms of its kind in New York. I'll see that a supper is sent up, Anna Mary. Riggs is out to-night, so Frieda will serve it."

She left the room and Anna Mary removed Beth's coat ; then they both waited. It did not seem long to Beth before another maid came and began to lay a place at the table ; she was so much interested in looking at the sparkling glass, the massive silver on a highboy at one end of the room, at the pictures, the carvings, all the marvels surrounding her, that she would willingly have waited far longer for the coming of supper. But now the deft maid silently spread a drawn-work cloth at one end of the table, set it with china so frail, so beautiful that Beth was not quite sure whether it was

china or confections. Then she brought steaming chocolate in a pot that matched the tall cup which had especially fascinated Beth, cold chicken in a bed of cresses, the thinnest bread that Beth had ever seen, cakes that made all else of no consequence, and two or three fruits preserved in their own syrupy juices.

"Supper is served for your young lady, Anna Mary," said the maid speaking low.

Anna Mary pulled back Beth's heavy chair and the wondering child took her place. But this time she could hardly eat, delicious as everything was. The breakfast room had so filled her that food had no place after it.

"You're not makin' out much, Miss Beth, but maybe it's as well. It's likely late for the likes of you to be suppin'," said Anna Mary kindly.

"I go to bed at half-past eight at home," said Beth, glancing at the little sparkling clock that struck once to say that it was one-quarter after nine.

"Well then, we'll have to hurry to catch up with the time that's behind us," said Anna Mary, and took Beth's hand to get her away from a room that she saw had fascinated her.

She led her to an elevator in the hall. Mrs. Hodgman again met them at its door. "The little girl has been given the blue willow room on the third floor, Anna Mary," she said. "Good-night, my dear; I hope you will rest well and waken very happy in these new surroundings."

"Thank you," said Beth. "I hope you will, too."

She was so bewildered at finding an elevator waiting for her in a private house that she did not know what she said ; hitherto elevators had meant to her stores or hotels in Boston. This one was padded and cushioned in golden browns ; it had mirrors all around its sides above its padded wainscoting. Beth felt as if she were being put into a jewel box, for the elevator was small. "I know exactly how my garnet ring felt when it came," she said. Fortunately Anna Mary did not hear ; she would have thought Beth's journey had tired her into delirium.

The boy in a mulberry uniform who ran the elevator stopped it almost as soon as he had started it.

"This way," said Anna Mary, and took Beth up the hall to a door which she opened. The room it revealed was lighted, the bedclothing was turned back, a fire burned on the hearth.

Beth stood still uttering a faint : "Oh !"

The room was not large, but it was square. Its woodwork was snowy white, its floor covered with a blue velvet carpet so thick and soft, so beautiful in shade that Beth dared not move across it. A white dresser stood between a cluster of blue flower lights ; a white dressing table stood opposite between another such group of lights. Willow chairs, blue cushioned, or all snowy white, stood around ; a teakwood table and a teakwood bookcase gave the tone needed to bring out the delicate beauty of this room, and the bedstead, a four poster with a blue tester, was made of willow, like the chairs, and covered with a white silk

counterpane, embroidered with blue violets strewn all over its surface. Blue velour curtains over snowy lace ones shut off the light from the two windows and made a background for the whole.

"It isn't my room, Anna Mary?" gasped Beth. Anna Mary had fearlessly crossed the delicate carpet and had opened a door and hung Beth's coat—oh, if Miss Tappan could have dreamed of this room when she made that coat!—in what Beth supposed was the closet, and turned to her to get her hat.

"Whose else?" demanded Anna Mary. "In here's your dressin' room and wardrobes, Miss Beth. There's runnin' water here; you'll likely share your cousins' bathroom; I'll show you it." She led the way through the dressing room and through a small square entry with four doors opening on it, Beth's door and three others.

"Those doors lead to your two young girl cousins' rooms, Miss Natalie and Miss Alys's apartments, and this is the bathroom which they use, and you will use it, or they wouldn't have given you the room you have—it's a family room, do you see? Guests never are put in this wing of the house, not outside guests," explained Anna Mary.

"Yes," said Beth, but she did not see in the least. All that she saw was a room that convinced her the whole thing was a fairy story into which she had got by some means, much as Alice fell into Wonderland, for no mere bathroom could be like this! The ceiling was thick, cloudy glass; through it a clear, soft light,

like moonlight, flooded the room. The floor was white marble; at one point it began to slant down till it disappeared in a lake of water that gently rose up in varying depths to meet it. Up the white walls climbed vines abloom with pale tea roses; Beth had to touch them to be sure that they were painted. Over beyond the lake, which was the beautiful substitute for the tubs that Beth had seen, were water-lilies floating on a little pond separate from the lake—and these were real—they were growing there; Beth touched them and they bent under her finger and gave out their exquisite perfume.

“Mr. Cortlandt designed this swimmin’ tank himself, Miss Beth. It is the most beautiful private bathroom in town, they say,” said Anna Mary. “Your cousin, Master Dirk, has a much larger swimmin’ pool, but then his is the one off the gymnasium, and it’s used for that too; the young ladies’ bath is for them alone—only now you will use it.”

“How shall I ever, ever tell Aunt Rebecca so she’ll understand? I don’t understand myself,” said Beth going back to her blue room in the wake of Anna Mary in a sort of trance. “My cousins are not really young ladies, are they?” she asked arousing to what Anna Mary had said.

“Miss Natalie is fifteen years old, Miss Alys is something above twelve, and Master Dirk is nearly eleven,” said Anna Mary. “Your trunk hasn’t come, Miss Beth—those baggage transfer men, you can’t be dependin’ on them! I’ll borrow a night-dress of Miss

Alys's from her maid—she's not much bigger than you, though she is older."

Anna Mary disappeared. When she came back Beth had folded her gown over the back of a chair, and was brushing her hair with gingerly touches, born of her misgiving in using the wrought silver backed brush which she had found on her dressing table.

"Oh, that will never do, Miss Beth!" cried Anna Mary, and Beth flushed deeply as she said:

"I was afraid it wouldn't, Anna Mary, but there wasn't any other brush here. Mine will come tomorrow, won't it?" She hastily replaced the elaborate brush on the table.

"It's not the brush I meant," said Anna Mary appropriating it. "But you must wait to have your hair brushed. I'll do it to-night, but after this there'll be some one to wait on you—I don't know whether it will be Célie, Miss Natalie and Miss Alys's maid, or another one. But it's not proper for you to dress your own hair. Sit there, Miss Beth, in that low chair before the dressin' table while I brush your hair. Why, it's very nice hair, Miss Beth!" Anna Mary added, as Beth obeyed her and she began to brush out its crinkled masses. "Now to think such fine hair should be braided till a body would no more notice it than she would a manilla rope; it's a cryin' shame, so it is! We'll have your hair washed till it's as fluffy as corn silk and as bright, and we'll dress it suitable, Miss Beth, and you'll see! You must have a dressin' slip of some sort to put on when your maid's brushin'—but Mrs.

Cortlandt will look after that. Now, Miss Beth, here's the night-dress I borrowed from Miss Alys for you. Will I help you, or will you do for yourself from this on?"

"I always dress and undress myself, Anna Mary," said Beth guessing at her meaning. "Oh, Anna Mary, you've brought something instead of a night-dress!"

She checked herself from saying "a party dress," but that was what she thought Anna Mary lifted from the bed and shook out of its folds—it was a gown of soft china silk, trimmed with delicate narrow lace and tied with long white ribbons.

"This is a night-dress, Miss Beth," said Anna Mary glancing with understanding at Beth's plain little white underwaist, and red and gray striped flannel petticoat. Beth caught the look and took the night-dress without another word. When she had put it on and had tied its ribbons and settled the lace around her tanned little hands she knelt beside the wonderful willow bed, and buried her face in the silken down comforter which had been revealed when Anna Mary folded the violet-embroidered counterpane. Beth still said "Now I lay me," like the simple little girl that she was, but it is doubtful if she could get her mind on her prayers with the silken night-dress caressing the bare soles of her feet, and when she was about to lay her down to sleep in such a bedstead.

"Oh, Anna Mary, it can't be true!" she sighed rapturously as a faint suggestion of a delicate odor met her as her head sank into the pillow and Anna Mary

returned to be sure that she wanted nothing more. "I couldn't want anything more, Anna Mary, because there isn't anything more. And there's no use going to sleep to dream of fairy-land, the way I did at home, for I see more fairy-land with my eyes open than I can dream. I'm perfectly happy, but I don't think I can sleep, Anna Mary; it's all so wakeful-wonderful!"

"Try, Miss Beth," urged Anna Mary. "There's so much for you to enjoy you want to get up bright and rested. Will I turn off all the lights, or leave some for you?"

"Maybe you'd better make it dark, Anna Mary, please, though it does seem a shame to waste such a room in black darkness. Good-night, and thank you very much," said Beth pressing her hot cheek into the cool linen covered pillow and watching the turning of the switch that shut from her vision the beauties amid which she lay.

The light from Fifth Avenue gradually brought out some of the furnishings of the room in a gray dimness. The padded fall of the horses' feet on the asphalt road below kept the little girl awake for a while, but the weariness of healthy childhood conquered at last, and Beth slept sound through the night and late into the morning.

It was Anna Mary who came to call her. Beth sat up, shocked to see by the little clock on the bookcase that it was nearly nine o'clock.

"Anna Mary!" she cried springing out of bed. "What time do you have breakfast?"

"Your cousins have theirs at eight, Miss Beth; your aunt wishes them to be at their lessons with their governess by nine. Sometimes your aunt does not breakfast with them, but most times she does," said Anna Mary. "Your uncle went away early in his motor car, so this mornin' your aunt breakfasted in her room. It doesn't matter at all, and it's lucky you slept so well. Your cousins do be crazy to see you, but it's too late for this mornin'. Your aunt sent me to fetch you to her sittin'-room when you've dressed and breakfasted. She's going to take you shoppin'."

"Oh, help me hurry, please, Anna Mary, if you've time," pleaded Beth.

"Isn't that what I came for?" demanded Anna Mary obligingly getting down to pull on Beth's stockings, though the little girl had no idea of receiving that sort of service.

It was a hurried toilet, and a hurried breakfast; it impaired Beth's appetite to feel that her aunt was waiting, first to make her acquaintance, and then to take her out. She could not realize what Anna Mary told her of Mrs. Cortlandt's needing longer than Beth was giving her to get through her daily duty of reading letters and dictating replies to her secretary. At last she followed Anna Mary to her aunt's sitting-room door and for the first time shrank somewhat from the ordeal of meeting new relatives.

"Yes, come in," called a pleasant voice as Anna Mary knocked. Beth slipped within the door and stood shyly on the threshold. She saw a slender, dark-



BETH RAN OVER TO THE GRACIOUS LADY.

eyed lady seated at a table before the hearth. She held out both hands to Beth and cried sweetly : “ Is this my dear little niece from the Massachusetts hills ? My dear, you don’t know how glad your uncle and I are to have his beloved sister Nannie’s little girl come to us ! Come here and let me kiss and kiss you ! ”

Beth ran over to the gracious lady, melting in the warmth of this tender greeting, spoken in a beautifully modulated voice. She returned Mrs. Cortlandt’s kisses with her warm young cheek pressed against her Aunt Alida’s fragrant cool one, and gave her adoring love to her on the instant. She was a vision such as Beth’s eyes had never rested upon, beautifully gowned, exquisitely dainty, charming and pretty, and young ! Beth had never associated aunthood with less than fifty years, basing her impression on Aunt Rebecca.

“ We are going out immediately, Beth—the dear little quaint name ! It precisely suits you, little pigeon ! ” she cried touching a silver call-bell on the table. “ Frieda,” she said to the maid who responded, “ call up the stables and bid John have the horses here as soon as he can ; in the victoria, tell him, Frieda. And, Frieda, Miss Beth and I will lunch out. Tell Miss Natalie and Miss Alys that their cousin will be here this afternoon when they return from their ride at four. Tell them that they must wait patiently till then to see her.

“ And now, little Beth, amuse yourself as you can while your aunt has Anna Mary get her ready to take you out for your first glimpse of the marvelous New

York shops," Aunt Alida added when Frieda had withdrawn noiselessly to do her bidding.

Beth was already clad in her coat and round hat with the ribbons whose difference of shade was more apparent here than it had been at home. There was no difficulty in amusing herself; Aunt Alida's sitting-room was a treasure house about which Beth wandered with hands carefully clasped behind her back, inspecting and marveling. The time seemed short until Aunt Alida returned wrapped in heavy furs, her handsome face shaded by the great plumes on her velvet hat.

Beth got into the victoria and sank back on its mulberry-colored seat letting the footman draw around her the great bear robe, knowing now without doubt that she was Cinderella under the blessed spell of her fairy godmother's magic. The footman climbed up beside the coachman, folded his mulberry-colored arms across his mulberry-colored breast—Beth did not yet know that Aunt Alida's livery was mulberry-colored. The coachman gathered up the reins, holding his whip stiffly from under the fur cape that covered his mulberry-colored shoulders. The splendid horses, quite as splendid and prancing as any that drew the chariots in the June circus procession at home, started, champing their way slowly down the broad avenue beginning to fill with gay equipages, private and public.

Beth could hardly reply to Aunt Alida's remarks. Her aunt saw that the child was swallowed up in the brilliant novelty of the great city, deliciously quivering

lest they run into, or were run into by the vehicles that crowded the thoroughfare increasingly as they descended toward Murray Hill. The sun was shining from a cloudless sky, the rare, fleckless, one might almost say animated sky of a perfect autumn day in New York. The metropolis was giving its best—and New York's best is much—to the little girl who had come to see it. Aunt Alida kindly let Beth alone to drink in and enjoy her first impressions in her own way. At a point where another broad street, this one alive with trolley cars, crossed the avenue on which they drove, Beth saw that their driver bore to the right, increasing the dangers of this hair-erecting drive by threading his way across the double lines of trolleys. He stopped at last before a large store; its windows were full of entrancing things. The footman sprang down to open the door, and stiffly touched his hat to Beth as she descended, to her great embarrassment. She followed her aunt into the shop, straight to an up-stairs department. Mrs. Cortlandt asked to be shown something the name of which Beth did not catch. The saleswoman brought her boxes upon boxes of the daintiest white things—and they were all exactly the size that Beth could not help seeing would fit herself!

Aunt Alida began to buy; Beth had never seen any one buy in this way. "Send me six of these, a dozen of those," she ordered, and paid for nothing. But Beth saw that the people in the shop served her eagerly. Mrs. Cortlandt went swiftly from room to room. In

the room where she looked at bewilderingly charming gowns, coats, guimpes, she began to consult Beth.

"Since these are to be yours, my dear, you may as well tell me what you like best of those I am willing that you should have," she said.

To be hers! It took her breath away; it was impossible to prefer amid such equal beauty. Somehow Beth knew that a long coat, soft white furs, three hats of various types, each perfect of its kind; several dear, simple house gowns, street gowns, party gowns, frail white guimpes, shoes, an eider-down wrapper that made one long to be a little ill to wear it all day; a cunning miniature dressing wrap, like a grown lady's, bedroom slippers, dancing slippers, a fan, gloves, and at last a bathing suit, had all been ordered home by her aunt—and they were all, all for Beth Bristead!

Beth walked behind her aunt to the ribbon counter where she bought a quantity of soft, wide ribbons, "for your hair, little Beth," Aunt Alida explained.

For her hair! The beautiful ribbon that Aunt Rebecca's sewing society had bought to make a ruffle around the sofa pillow they raffled at the fair was not as fine as these ribbons! Beth pinched herself; she was in an ecstasy, but it couldn't possibly be real! She experimented with her soft flesh to see if it still was hurtable, every-day, little girl flesh.

"Now, Beth dear, we are going to lunch," announced Aunt Alida. "I have had a few things sent out to the carriage for you to wear at once, and the rest will be delivered by to-night. I am ravenously hungry!"

Aren't you hungry, little niece? You look—well, you look dazed, but I'm glad to say I think you look happy. Aren't you hungry?"

"No, Aunt Alida, thank you; I'm not hungry—I'm a changeling," said Beth solemnly.

"Which is a totally different complaint," laughed Aunt Alida. "You funny morsel of a lassie! Aren't you fond of pretty things, Bethie? Isn't it fun to be a changeling? I give you my word I've had a perfectly beautiful time playing the fairy that changes you! Aren't you happy, little niece?"

"Happy! Happy!" echoed Beth in a rapture beyond expressing.

CHAPTER IV

THE FAIRY-LAND CHILDREN

BETH and her aunt came home a little before three. Luncheon in a hotel restaurant, Pompeian red and bronze in coloring, with flowers on every table and ladies at every table, also, whom one could hardly tell from the flowers, and an orchestra playing such music as Beth had never heard, completed the bewilderment of the morning. The little girl returned to her uncle's house like a small blossom overfull of honey; she had seen so many splendors that she could take in no more.

Mrs. Hodgman followed Mrs. Cortlandt to her sitting-room where Beth had also been taken.

"Mrs. Cortlandt," the housekeeper began, "I have arranged for a maid for Miss Beth, if you approve. Frieda would be glad to serve the young lady. There is a maid whom I can take on in Frieda's place, if you are satisfied to promote Frieda to the position of Miss Beth's maid."

"Frieda—that is the pleasant girl who serves my breakfast when I take it in my room? Yes, she will do excellently," approved Mrs. Cortlandt. "Will you kindly have her sent to me at once? Since Miss Beth's maid is already at hand she may begin her duties now.

Thank you, Mrs. Hodgman. I hope the change will not incommode you ; it is troublesome to train a new—parlor maid, wasn't Frieda ? ”

“ Yes, madam, but I am sure that the girl who will replace her comes with an excellent training,” said Mrs. Hodgman. “ Frieda shall come to you at once, Mrs. Cortlandt.”

Beth listened half in dismay. What should she do with a maid ? Or, rather, what would the maid do to her ? Yet, evidently, she was to have one, a whole maid of her own, precisely as if she were the Princess Elizabeth whom she often had played at being, at home in the old-fashioned garden !

Mrs. Cortlandt opened a pile of personal letters which her secretary had laid on her table for this end. Beth was admiring the tiny jeweled blade that her aunt used, when Frieda knocked.

“ Ah, Frieda ! yes,” said Mrs. Cortlandt. “ You are to be my little niece's new maid. I hope that you will serve her well. If you need instruction in your task go to Anna Mary for advice ; she will guide you. Go with Miss Beth to her room now, and help her put on a blue gown which I brought home with me, and which has been sent up-stairs. There are ribbons, shoes, stockings with it, you will find. By the time she has been made ready her cousins will return from their ride, and will not be willing to wait longer to meet her. Come to me, Beth, here, after you are dressed. And, Frieda, there are a good many things coming for Miss Beth, an outfit more appropriate to town than the clothes

that she wore in the country. When they are delivered please put them away in her wardrobes, and mark the underclothing with her initials, please. You understand lettering?"

"Yes, madam; I was taught in Germany," said Frieda.

"Then well taught," said Mrs. Cortlandt with her smile that won all who served her to serve her well. "Run away now with Frieda, Bethie dear, and come back to me as soon as she has made you from an out-doors girl into a little house-girl."

Beth went obediently. She was not sure which was her room, but Frieda led the way up-stairs to it directly, and Beth's heart leaped again as she opened the door upon its beauty, now illumined by the long light of mid-afternoon, and the fire still burning on the hearth.

"Could you sit there, Frieda, and let me sit here while you talk to me?" suggested Beth settling herself into the lowest and loveliest of the willow rockers before the fire.

"You could sit there, Miss Beth, but I certainly couldn't sit here," said Frieda. "Even if it would be right—and it wouldn't—I have to open these boxes and get out what your aunt wants you to wear this afternoon." And Frieda rapidly began her work.

"Oh, let me see them, Frieda. I saw so many that I don't know which Aunt Alida took, and I don't know which of those she took she brought home in the carriage!" cried Beth falling out of her chair in the keenness of her interest. "Don't you ever sit down and do

nothing in New York, Frieda? It's only because it's my first day that it rushes so, isn't it?"

"I can't say that's it, Miss Beth," said Frieda. "If you'd come here from Germany you'd think things rushed all the time."

"Some day, if ever we can sit down, you'll tell me about Germany, won't you please, Frieda? I always thought it must be heavenly to live in a country where storks stood on one leg on the edges of chimneys on straw-covered roofs, as they do in Germany, in my Grimm's Tales," cried Beth. "Isn't that the dearest dress? Don't you imagine Aunt Alida brought it home with us so I could put it on before my cousins saw me, and so they wouldn't think I didn't look nice? Of course I see already that Miss Tappan, who made my winter suit, isn't quite such a fine, fine dressmaker as she looks where Aunt Rebecca lives—where Miss Tappan and I live, too."

"Miss Beth," said Frieda, wisely avoiding the question, "I've laid everything out, even your wrapper, and now, if you please, I'll have to dress you; we haven't any too much time,"

"All right," sighed Beth. "Will you tell me how to begin to let you dress me, Frieda? I always dress myself, you know."

Frieda laughed outright; she was a young and pretty maid, much nearer Beth's idea of a maid than Anna Mary, whom, Beth reproachfully reminded herself, she had found most kind. But she was glad that Frieda was young and pretty.

"Well, then, Miss Beth," Frieda instructed her, "first of all, if you will sit on that higher chair, please, I will put on these nice silk stockings and your slippers."

Beth complied. When they were on she surveyed her slender legs and feet with undisguised admiration. "I never knew they could look like that!" she sighed, remembering the sturdy straightness of the lines of her feet in their old-time coverings.

Swiftly Frieda divested the little girl of the plain underclothing, stitching, buttons and a narrow edge of Hamburg embroidery its only ornaments, which Aunt Rebecca had made. In its place she clothed her in the dainty French garments of Aunt Alida's buying, tucked, lace-inserted, ruffled, and cut on lines of beauty.

Beth laid her discarded underskirt beside her new one, contrasting them. "Poor Aunt Rebecca!" she said. "But she wouldn't mind if she understood—but she never, never will! They look exactly like the two aunts who got them for me."

Frieda was not heeding Beth's audible reflections. "Now, Miss Beth, your hair," she said, and Beth, profiting by her experience of the previous night, seated herself before the dressing table. Frieda threw over her shoulders a butterfly garment made of handkerchiefs, apparently, and began to brush Beth's abundant hair.

"To-morrow, if you please, Miss Beth, you must let me shampoo it till it is like yellow thistle silk," said Frieda. "This is the best I can do now."

Frieda's best was a very good best. Beth stared at

herself amazed. Her hair fell in a pretty mass of color around her shoulders. It rippled up from her temples, yet shaded them lightly as it had never done in all its straight-brushed-back existence. A great bow of soft wide ribbon, a plaid of rainbow colors, stood straight up on the top of Beth's head, like a sort of aureole of fashion.

"Mercy, Frieda! How did you ever do it?" cried Beth, appreciating the extreme glory of the bow that Frieda had tied.

First a white guimpe, so delicate in texture that its wee tucks seemed impossible, then a blue gown over that, bright yet dark, touched here and there with white lace and glimpses of a red that was like the sunset, half melted into gold, and Beth stood before the glass not knowing whether or not to believe her eyes.

The face that blushed back at her was Beth Bristead's face, in spite of the new and stylish arrangement of the hair, but—it was pretty! It was even very pretty! It had never occurred to Beth before that she was a pretty child, and the discovery overtopped the bliss of owning such a beautiful gown. It was wonderful—all of it, the dear slippers and silken stockings, the pretty gown, but above all the pretty Beth! Being a sweet-natured little soul Beth's first impulse on making the discovery of her own prettiness was the wholesome impulse of loving gratitude. She felt a great wave of love for Frieda who had dressed her so well, and she worshiped the Aunt Alida who had bought her the treasures which had turned the little

brown wren from the brown country house into this brilliant blue bird of paradise, fit for a New York cage. If Aunt Rebecca could have read her heart then all her fears that luxury would spoil little Beth might have been set at rest, for if good fortune makes a person loving and grateful no amount of it can harm her.

"Frieda, Frieda, Frieda!" Beth cried, and threw her arms around her maid, just as she stooped to pick a tiny white thread off the hem of Beth's skirt.

"It looks beautiful, Miss Beth; it's no wonder you're pleased," said Frieda, discreetly. But she looked pleased herself, and inwardly thanked her stars that she was to serve such an affectionate and unspoiled little lady. "I think you're ready now, and your aunt will be looking for you, Miss Beth," Frieda added.

Beth started for the door. "I ought to pick up the room, Frieda," she said, stopped by the orderly habits in which Aunt Rebecca had trained her.

"That's partly what I'm for, Miss Beth. It isn't your work," said Frieda, beginning it.

"I wouldn't mind stopping for it, Frieda; I think I'd like to do it; I think I'm scared to go down alone," said Beth. But she went on her way, none the less.

Her aunt heard Beth hesitating at her sitting-room door before she gently pushed it a little farther open. "Come in, Bethie," she called. Beth saw her in a silken wrap lying on the couch before her hearth fire.

"Come over here where I can see you, little niece. Will you please touch that button beside the door to turn on the centre lights so that I can see you better?"

Mrs. Cortlandt said. "Why, what a fine little bird these new fine feathers have made of you!" she cried starting up in genuine pleasure.

Beth flung herself on her aunt's shoulder, forgetting fear in her gratitude, responding to the smile in Aunt Alida's dark eyes.

"Aunt Alida," she cried, "I've got to kiss you! I'm 'most crazy, I'm so happy and I look so nice, and I've truly got to kiss you!"

Mrs. Cortlandt laughed as she received Beth's violent kisses. "Did you think I should object to being kissed?" she asked.

And then there came a hurrying of feet up the padded stairs and three figures burst into the room. Beth straightened herself and looked at them, for she knew that they were her cousins.

She saw a tall girl with dark eyes, more flashing, brilliant eyes than Aunt Alida's. She wore a riding habit, its skirt caught up slightly, showing russet riding boots. She wore a short coat and a hard hat and carried a stock in her gauntleted hand; the severity of her costume set off the brilliant beauty of her young face. Beside her stood another girl, not much taller than Beth, and fair, like Beth, but she had none of Beth's rosiness, nor was she as pretty. She, too, wore a riding habit, green, like her sister's, but with a soft hat, and she carried a whip. Behind the two girls was a boy, short and sturdy, with the elder girl's dark eyes, and the younger's fair hair, but the boy's hair was cut so short that its color hardly mattered. His face was

full of mischief that seemed to run over into the room—as it often did, in fact, as Beth was to discover later.

“Children, this is Beth,” said Mrs. Cortlandt. “Here is your own cousin, though you never have seen her before. Beth, this is Natalie, Alys and Dirk.”

Natalie and Alys kissed Beth and murmured a greeting; Dirk shook hands with her so limply that it was surprising when one saw how firm knit and strong his hand was. Then the four stared at one another for a moment of criticism.

Natalie spoke with the advantage of her fifteen years. “Alys and I are going up to get ready for dinner. Won’t you come up to our rooms and chat? We have a new box of chocolates,” she said.

“Yes, Natalie, that’s a good suggestion,” said her mother with an air of relief. “Carry Beth off with you; chocolates sweeten the hardships of getting acquainted. Your uncle will dine at home to-night, Bethie; he is anxious to know his sister’s little girl.”

Dirk disappeared after the fashion of a lively small boy who neither wants girls nor is wanted by them. Natalie tucked Beth’s hand under her arm with her riding stock, and Alys followed them up-stairs.

Natalie led the way to the door just beyond Beth’s room. She opened it, revealing a large chamber, furnished in Tuna mahogany, hung with old rose and dark reds, carpeted with plain velvet carpet in a reddish brown, a curious, splendid room which made a becoming setting for the slender dark girl it sheltered, as Beth dimly perceived without understanding it.

Next to this room, connected with it, was a beautiful green room, furnished in bird's-eye maple, a green carpet rug on its floor, green and white empire brocade on its walls, green curtains, and a stand of waving ferns in its northern window.

This was Alys's room, and Beth exclaimed: "Isn't this a dear room! It looks like 'By cool Siloam's shady rill.'"

Natalie and Alys stared; they did not know how large a part in Beth's education hymns had played. But Alys was pleased; she gave Beth the first smile that she had accorded her. The smile deepened as Beth darted forward, espying on a cushion a plump tiger kitten, who raised a short, cheerful little face that looked smiling, and a pair of large eyes, as Beth buried her fingers in fur that was as fine and soft as chinchilla.

"What a darling!" she cried fervently.

"She's a perfect angel!" cried Alys thawing fast. "She talks all the time, answers each time we speak to her, and she knows as well as you would what I say when I ask her where her ball is. Poppy, where's your ball?" she added to prove her words.

The kitten stretched and jumped down. For an instant she poised on her forefeet in descending, and Beth laughed.

"We're afraid there is something wrong about her; she can't quite control her hind legs," Natalie explained the movement. "Poppity-pippity-wum!" she added pettingly.

"M-m-m-m!" cooed the kitten answering, as Alys had foretold that she would do.

Poppy brought out a worsted ball for which she had been hunting under the chairs and triumphantly laid it at Alys's feet.

"Didn't I tell you she was an angel?" cried Alys. "We call her Poppy because she pops up so queerly in her back legs. Oh, Poppity-pippity-wum, you blessed Poppy-pip!" She snatched the kitten to her breast and buried kisses in her soft fur.

A maid came in and Natalie spoke to her in French; awestruck Beth knew that it was French because there were French market gardeners near her home.

"My bath is ready, so you must excuse me, Beth," said Natalie. "Alys must go to get ready for hers, too. We always swim a little after riding. Will you stay here with Poppy? Then you can sit with us while we have our hair done, and we'll eat chocolates and get acquainted."

"I'd like to go into my room to write a note to Aunt Rebecca," said Beth shyly.

"Why, of course. You won't get another chance to-night," agreed Natalie. "Run along, little Coz."

Beth ran. She closed her door and wrote rapidly with a pencil on a pad which she found waiting for her, a pad not like her school pads, but one of the finest paper.

"Dear Aunt Rebecca," she said. "I am well. I got here very well. Anna Mary is kind; she was a twin, and the other one was called Mary Anna. Aunt

Alida is prettier than any picture in all the magazines. She is so kind I love her most to death. Natalie is pretty; Alys is light like me. There is a kitten that is lovely named Poppy because her hind legs sorter pop up when she jumps. I don't know about Dirk. The house is so beautiful that words could never tell, you couldn't think what it was like. Fairies never had such a house. I've got more lovely clothes than a princess and a maid all my own. Her name is Freedah—I don't know if that is right spelling. The house is all over servants everywhere. You wouldn't wonder. Anybody would want to be a servant here. There is an ellyvator like my garnet ring box. My room is blue velvet and wood-fire and silk quilt and comforter—you never saw such a house. My love to Janie and all the girls. I will write them if I can. In New York you can't write, I guess. My love to Tabby. My love to Ella Lowndes; tell her I have a whole maid to help me, all my own. My love to Miss Tappan. My love to you. I hope you are well. I shall be perfectly good for I ought to be because everybody makes me in a fairy story. Your loving niece, Elizabeth Bristead. P. S. New York is very bright. The cab that took us here is run by something without horses and a man up behind to steer. It is very strange. From Beth."

Beth hastily put her letter into its envelope, and ran back to Natalie's room. She found both her cousins in their wrappers, Natalie having her hair arranged, Alys waiting her turn and both eating chocolates. Dirk

bounced up behind Beth as she started to go in and made her jump.

"Go away, Dirk; we don't want you," cried Natalie.

"Go straight away," added Alys.

Dirk grinned and entered behind Beth. "I'm going to have some candy, too; I heard what you told Beth," he said. "And *she* wants me." He looked wickedly at Beth, whose face plainly declared her opinion of his intrusion.

"May I direct my letter with ink? I haven't any. And when does the mail go out?" Beth asked.

Dirk promptly stood on his head. "Whoop-ee!" he shouted. "The mail go out!"

"Dirk!" said Natalie sharply. "We put our letters in the mail boxes, Beth, and we don't know when they go out; they are taken up every—oh, often; I don't know when. And you will find ink in my desk over there. Alys, help Beth."

Alys lazily arose and showed Beth where to find what she wanted. "Célie, prenez cette lettre avec les autres," she said to the maid. Her French was not equal to Natalie's, but it made Beth feel quite overcome to find her cousins speaking another tongue.

"Do you love to dance?" asked Alys suddenly.

"I don't know how," admitted Beth sadly.

"We'll teach you," said Natalie quickly. "Alys, Célie is ready for you now. Take a chocolate, my dear Beth; take a handful. Come with me and help me get into my gown. I'm going to hurry dressing to-night."

Beth went with Natalie into the adjoining dressing room. She felt like a very little girl. To be sure at home big girls of fifteen seemed older than she, but Natalie was almost a young lady—still she was kind. And Alys seemed worlds away from this little country cousin. While she found herself wishing that Dirk actually was worlds away, he called after her :

“Look out, Beth; Nat keeps mice in her dressing room !” With which pleasant fiction he disappeared, and Beth heard him sliding down the balustrade in the hall with a wild whoop which was like the whoops of the boys at home, whom she and Janie Little always feared.

After a time Natalie was ready for dinner in a crimson cloth gown that made her look “like an Indian princess,” thought Beth vaguely. Alys was dainty in her pale pink. Both girls wore their hair rolled behind their ears and tied in great drooping bows. Their hands were white, with nails like ivory tips. Beth glanced at her own firm little tanned hands, and their round little nails that showed the marks of gardening and climbing. “I’m going to grow them !” she thought, and followed the girls down-stairs.

Mrs. Cortlandt met them. She was all in black lace, with American Beauty roses at her belt. Beth looked up at her aunt’s white shoulders and down at her train.

“Is there a party ?” she asked timidly.

“Only ourselves, Bethie. You’re the only party, and you’re such a very little party !” laughed Aunt Alida, tucking the little guest under her arm.

They went down to the library, and from the depths of a great chair arose a tall gentleman in evening clothes; at a glance Beth saw that she looked like him, but she was afraid of him, none the less.

"Jim, here is Bethie," said Aunt Alida, and Beth found that the tall man was kissing her most tenderly. "My dear, you look like your mother, and I'm much obliged to you," he said.

Then a solemn person, also in evening clothes, whom Beth had not seen, drew aside the portière.

"Madam, dinner is served," he said softly.

Mr. Cortlandt bent and put Beth's hand through his arm. "Allow me to take you out to dinner, Miss Bristead; Dirk, offer your mother your arm," he said.

Beth was so frightened that for a moment she wanted to run away or cry—both, perhaps. But she looked up sideways into her uncle's face and caught the twinkle in a pair of blue eyes decidedly like the pair that looked back at her every day in her glass. So she altered her mind, and laughed instead of crying.

Thus with perfect cheerfulness Beth went out to her first formal dinner.

CHAPTER V

ALL SORTS OF NEW STEPS

ONLY on the first morning of her visit did Beth oversleep. The second morning she was up bright and early, so early that, with some misgiving of doing wrong, she had dressed before Frieda came to call her.

"I couldn't lie still, Frieda," she said apologetically. "I did leave my hair for you to do ; I knew I could never make such a bow as you tie. But I wished I was a lot of girls to dress ; I didn't know what to do, I've been up so long. I wanted to make my bed, but I was afraid it would be wrong to make a bed in New York. I always made my own bed at Aunt Rebecca's."

"It's hard to get out of the habit of a thing," said Frieda, uncertain what she ought to reply to this statement.

"Yes," cried Beth eagerly. "Aunt Rebecca says we ought to be very careful about habits. She says they are just like poppies in a vegetable garden ; you get the package of seeds in the first place yourself, but after that they keep on growing in spite of you. Still, I must say I like poppies in the vegetables ; they look perfectly lovely in through the peas and standing up

over the beets and the spinach. But Aunt Rebecca always made me watch when the dear little seed cups turned brown and told me to gather all the seeds. But they came up every year just the same. She says that's the way with habits. Only I'm not as sure as I ought to be that I was very, very careful to catch every single seed! They are so tiny! It was hard not to spill any, but I'm not certain sure I cared if I gathered them when the wind blew and they were bound to spill. I guess we don't always care if we don't get over our habits, either. I have the habit of reading when I eat, and I don't believe I ever tried my best to get over it—it is just like poppy seeds, after all!”

“We put poppy seeds on the top of our bread in Germany,” said Frieda gathering up Beth's hair in her left hand, preparatory to tying it with the admired bow. She found Beth lovable, but perplexing. “You mustn't make your bed, Miss Beth,” she added. “Even I wouldn't do that; that's the chambermaid's work.”

“I should think it would be dreadfully hard never to do something somebody else ought to do when there are so many people to do every little thing,” said Beth. “That's even a lovelier, stickier-up bow than the plaid ribbon last night, Frieda,” she added, beaming at the blue ribbon now crowning her. It matched the pretty gown waiting its new wearer—for that was the way Beth thought of the dresses her aunt had bought her.

“They all are like lovely New York pieces of nice girls, waiting to get acquainted with me,” she had said to Frieda the previous night when her maid was fold-

ing and hanging up the beautiful garments which had come home for Beth.

"You are ready now, Miss Beth," said Frieda. "You will find all the family in the breakfast room, where you had supper the night you came. Mrs. Cortlandt always comes down when Mr. Cortlandt is at home. She likes to have her family breakfast together, and she won't let her children get up late."

"I'm to do lessons with them," said Beth rather sadly. "Aunt Alida said that she didn't want me to lose a whole winter's study, so of course I'll do what she likes me to, but I'm scared. Natalie and Alys speak French, Frieda!"

"Well, I'm sure you speak English enough to make up for it," said Frieda, puzzling Beth by this indirect tribute to her unconscious quaintness, the result of a life spent with eccentric Aunt Rebecca, and with the books which were the little girl's preferred comrades.

Beth went down the broad stairs and hesitatingly found her way to the door of the rose-hued breakfast room. It was a morning room, flooded by the early sunshine; it was more beautiful seen by the strong eastern light for which its colors were planned than it had been under the electricity. Beth stopped on its threshold, forgetting to salute the assembled family.

"It looks like 'Brightest and best of the sons of the morning'!" she cried.

"Beth, what do you mean?" demanded Natalie. Beth's uncle put down his paper to listen to her answer.

"The hymn, you know," explained Beth, "and the

room ; it's so—so, as if it would 'shine on our darkness,' you know, when you come into it from the hall."

Riggs, the butler, with the greatest difficulty suppressed a smile which would have been so unbecoming to his office that it would, so to speak, have unbutlered him if he had not been able to prevent its coming. Happily he succeeded, but Aunt Alida laughed, and Uncle Jim shouted, though Beth could not see anything amusing.

"Here's your place, beside your old uncle ; come and take it, little Puritan," he cried. "Do you know what you are, Beth ?"

"Yes, but not what you mean I am," said Beth, unexpectedly, with a twinkle exactly like her uncle's in her own blue eyes.

"You are a Survival and an Anomaly," said Uncle Jim gravely.

"Oh, dear !" said Beth, pretending to sigh, appreciating these formidable words as fun, even though she could not understand them.

"You are a Survival of our grandmother's day, and consequently an Anomaly in modern Gotham," explained Uncle Jim, without letting light upon the subject. "Don't you like grape fruit, little S. and A. ?"

"It is a little bitter," said Beth trying to keep from shuddering as she spoke.

"It is like adversity, has a certain bitterness, yet sweet are its uses. Riggs, take Miss Elizabeth's fruit and pass her Master Dirk's jam. Dirk doesn't like grape fruit either, Beth," said this gay uncle, whose

boyishly breezy manner was a delightful surprise in a full-grown man.

"Is that all of Dirk's name, Uncle Jim? It— isn't it a New York way of saying Dick?" asked Beth.

"No, indeed!" cried Uncle Jim. "That is a Dutch name. Don't you know, my dear, that we are of Holland Dutch descent, and are immensely proud of it?"

"We are? Oh, you mean—yes, I see! My mother was. The Bristeads are Massachusetts people, Aunt Rebecca says. She says a Bristead marched out with the Lexington men, on the 19th of April, 1775. Aunt Rebecca says he played the fife all the way to the fight and then fought like fifty," said Beth proudly.

"You mean like fifty," said Alys. "Don't give us history at breakfast, Beth."

"I advise you to take history wherever you can get it; you need it," said Natalie.

Beth finished her breakfast in silence. She dimly felt a little snubbed by Alys; besides the rose room was so jewel-like in its beauty that she was glad to enjoy it while her uncle and aunt discussed plans in which she did not know that she had an interest, but which concerned her closely.

"Now for the day's work!" said Natalie when she arose from the table. "You haven't seen the school-room, have you, Beth?"

"I haven't seen lots of the house," said Beth.

"That's so; we'll show it to you! Not this afternoon, because Alys and I are going to start you as a dancer to-day. To-morrow is dancing class day, and

I'm going to have you know a little about it before you see all the girls. But the next day—that will be Sunday?—after church, then, we'll take you all over this house. Now come up with us and show us what a learned person you are, Elizabeth Bristead. They say all Massachusetts children speak Greek just as naturally as they wear spectacles. But you don't wear spectacles, do you?" Natalie stooped to look close into Beth's eyes as if to make sure that this surprising fact were really true.

Beth laughed. Natalie's mixture of big girl kindness with perfect friendliness was winning Beth's affection fast; it was not a hard thing to do, for Beth was as inclined to love as a heliotrope is inclined to the warmth of the sun.

She slipped her hand confidingly into her oldest cousin's and they preceded Alys up-stairs. Dirk lingered to prove how easily he could overtake the girls two steps at a time. Beth knew that he had succeeded, because Alys screamed and sat down on her feet to protect her ankles from his energetic pinching. Dirk stood in awe of his father, but once safe from his eye Dirk lost few opportunities of making Alys's life a burden. He was planning like pleasures in Beth's case, whose gentle, shy and sweet manner promised her an easy victim.

"What a schoolroom!" cried Beth stopping short. "Why, I never saw such a schoolroom. There's nothing in our school at home like it! Is it all for you alone?"

"No, it's for you too, this winter," laughed Natalie.

It was a large room, square and sunny. Its burlaped walls were covered with copies of famous pictures and casts from glorious sculptures. Tables, and four desks, chairs, globes, instruments which Beth did not understand, all these the little girl saw in her first amazed look around the room. A bookcase full of books of all sizes, that looked as if they might also be of all sorts, filled one end of this magic schoolroom's great width.

"No wonder you speak French," murmured Beth.

"Don't you?" asked Alys.

"Not a single word," said Beth slowly and impressively. "Do you use all these things?" she added.

"We draw from the casts, and we use the instruments in our chemistry and astronomy, and that is our own school library," said Alys, "and our piano. You see we have special teachers for various branches, and lessons in certain things on certain days."

"And we learn riding and swimming and gymnastics out of school, and that's the best of it," said Dirk. "To-day we've got to have history and literature, and writing compositions—that's all one woman ——"

"He means the teacher," interrupted Alys. "But Miss Deland is a lady, not a woman."

"And it's the worst of the lot," Dirk concluded.

The "lady who was not a woman" arriving at that moment cut off further explanations. Beth saw a girl with a clear, strong face and the busy air of kindly preoccupation that meant that Miss Deland was a student who loved her work.

"This is the little cousin whom you expected?" she said at once. "How do you do, my dear?"

"Very well, thank you," said Beth faintly, overcome by the depths of ignorance which Miss Deland was about to discover in her.

Miss Deland lost no time. "Ready, Natalie, Alys, Dirk," she said. "And ——"

"Beth Bristead," Natalie said. "Beth may sit here, mayn't she, Miss Deland?"

She moved a chair near the window as she spoke, and pushed one of the small tables in front of it.

Then the work began. To Beth's relief there was no hint of any tongue but her own. She listened for a while, and, listening, plucked up heart. Natalie was reciting in English history. Beth could not have repeated Natalie's lesson, but it sounded half familiar to her. She did not know it, but she was a fortunate child in having been given the freedom of a library of English classics in Aunt Rebecca's house, which lacked so much of other, less important things.

Alys's recitation was in United States history, and this Beth knew thoroughly; she cheered up more and more as she saw that, though she was going to be crushed by her lucky cousins' accomplishments, there would be studies in which she would not disgrace them. After the three Cortlandts had recited Miss Deland set them to writing a synopsis of what they had repeated. While this was doing she examined Beth. When the examination was over Beth found herself before the bookcase at the end of the room talking excitedly to

Miss Deland about the many favorite volumes she was finding on its shelves, with the sudden conviction that private lessons with a governess was the most delightful thing in the world, instead of the ordeal that she had dreaded. The morning ended with a story which Miss Deland set each of her four pupils to write, the subject being one that she herself suggested. Beth was surprised to see Natalie and Alys struggling with their task ; Dirk wrote faster than either of his sisters. Beth, who had written stories ever since she could remember, and who cherished the hope of one day being a great author, finished her story first of all. It was the one Miss Deland selected to read aloud, " because "—Miss Deland actually said this !—" it was by far the best of the four."

Beth went to lunch a happy Beth ; it was hard to feel that her cousins could speak French, draw, play, dance, ride, knew astronomy, chemistry and nobody could say what else, and that she, Beth, could do nothing in particular. She was properly glad to excel them in something.

" We are going to be excused from our exercise this afternoon, Beth, to teach you to dance," said Natalie. " We always go out after lunch, but we aren't going to-day. You see next week is Thanksgiving, and we are going to give a dance. It is to introduce you to our friends. Of course, dear, my friends are too old for you, and Alys's are, too. Dirk is nearest your age, but his friends are all boys. So we're going to ask our own set, just as usual, but we are going to invite their younger brothers and sisters for you."

"Please don't, Natalie," said Beth. "I shouldn't know what to do with them."

"You don't have to do anything with them," said Alys. "We're going to give a dance. It's going to be a fancy dress dance, all in Puritan, or colonial costume, because it is Thanksgiving. It will be lots of fun."

"I'm going to dress up as a turkey gobbler and scare you girls to death," said Dirk.

"You'd better go as a goose," said Natalie.

"No, let him go as a gobbler, then he can have his neck wrung," said Alys sharply.

"I'll be an Indian and scalp you!" shouted Dirk turning red with rage.

"I guess it would be more like you to be Miles Standish that took care of the poor Pilgrims, because you are the only boy of this family," said Beth hastily, with her sweetest smile. Quarrels made her quite sick and she threw herself into the breach to prevent this one. Dirk stared at her. It was true that he tormented his sisters and was rather a trial, but they had never tried coaxing him into better ways. They considered him a nuisance and let him feel it; it was a new experience to Dirk to find a girl implying that a noble part would become him.

"Yes, I guess I would! A lot I'd take care of 'em," he muttered, but his wrathful look subsided, and he glanced at Beth with an expression that made her resolve to be friends with Dirk, awful as she had been thinking him.

"Well," Natalie resumed after this cloud had blown over, "you have only till next Thursday to learn to dance, Beth. So come up-stairs and begin this minute. You've simply got to two-step and waltz by then or you won't have any fun. You come up-stairs and Alys and I will take turns playing and teaching you, and to-morrow you are going to dancing class with us."

Beth meekly obeyed. For the next two hours her cousins relentlessly put her through vigorous dancing lessons in the schoolroom. At first she could not move her feet, but having an ear for rhythm she did better after a while, and by the time her teachers gave up for the day Beth could dance a two-step, after a fashion. Dirk came in and rewarded Beth for her kindness after lunch by offering to be her partner. Natalie and Alys were so surprised that they could hardly believe their ears; Dirk had never been known to do such a thing before in his ten years of life.

The next day was Saturday and in the morning the four children were to go to dancing class.

"Why, Frieda, isn't it a school?" cried Beth coming in from her bath to see a froth of dainty things laid out on her bed, ready for her to put on.

"It is, and it isn't; you'll see," said Frieda. "Mrs. Cortlandt picked out what you should wear."

So Beth, still wondering, submitted to being dressed; everything that Frieda put on was so beautiful that she soon began to be glad of any excuse for wearing it. All in white Beth found that she was to be clad, white stockings, white slippers, foamy white skirts, one above

another, and finally a white gown over them all, fine and simple, with only hem and tucks to ornament it, but showing through its delicacy the deep lace of her skirts. The only color about Beth was in her cheeks, her dilated blue eyes, her flying golden hair, for this Frieda had crowned with an immense white bow, the climax and queen of all preceding bows.

"Well, I look exactly, just exactly like the loveliest dressed girl in Miss Tappan's fashion books," said Beth, surveying herself in a sort of delirium. "I wish, I do wish that Janie Little could see me! But what on earth do girls wear here at parties, Frieda?"

"Dancing class, where you meet all the young ladies you know, Miss Beth, has to be dressed for much the same," said Frieda. "This is only what a quite young young lady like you must wear; just fine white things."

"Then do let me hurry to see Natalie and Alys," cried Beth.

Frieda wrapped Beth in a long, loose cloak and she found Natalie and Alys's splendors similarly eclipsed when she came out and met them in the hall. At the dancing school she forgot to notice what they wore, but she saw that Alys had never before been so pretty, and Natalie was as handsome as a tanager.

The room was full of girls, all so exquisite in tints of hair, eyes, cheeks and clothes that Beth forgot her own white daintiness.

"It is only more fairy-land," she thought. "Aunt Alida was right; she had to make me a fairy, too, or they'd have driven me back to mortals."

Natalie and Alys introduced Beth to girl after girl, brought boys to her and introduced them also, and, worst of all, took Beth to ladies who were sitting about the room and introduced her to them as their cousin who was spending the winter with them.

Beth grew so confused that she hardly knew how to carry herself.

"I know you hate it, Bethie, but they are mama's friends and she would like it; besides, if there are any children's parties this winter—and there will be—you must be asked," whispered Natalie. "Now you go into the practice class for beginners, and when the time comes to dance Alys and I will dance with you, to start you. Then you must accept every invitation you get to dance; it's polite and practice, too."

Bewildered Beth found herself in a line with much smaller children taking steps forward, back, to the right, to the left, following the tireless motions of a small man who set the children example in front of the line, gesticulating to mark time, and moving so lightly that Beth wondered if he had the usual sort of feet.

The music to which the class danced was rendered by a beautiful piano, violin and flute trio. After she grew accustomed to being where she was, Beth began to hear it better, and, hearing it, she lost consciousness of herself, and danced. The girls' teaching had been good; followed now by the winging effect of the entrancing music it took Beth out of the awkwardness of beginning. When the line stopped practice and the

teacher gave the signal to dance Natalie and Alys flew to Beth.

"We're proud of you, Beth!" cried Natalie. "You're going to make a dancer! You quiet little mouse, who'd have thought you'd have done so well!"

"I don't know. Hurry up, Natalie, let me dance!" cried Beth with sparkling eyes.

She danced and danced, not always well, because there were ever so many dances that she did not know, but with an enjoyment that made her partners forgive her mistakes. She never actually danced badly, because her ear for rhythm carried her through.

Célie, who had come with the children, wrapped Beth up at last to go home. She was flushed and trembling with delight; her white slippers tapped the floor and she pranced to the music echoing in her brain.

"Oh, I was always sorry for Cinderella when the clock struck twelve, but I never knew how awful it was for her! I don't want to go home; I want to dance and dance and dance!" she cried.

"You shall, but not all at once, Beth!" laughed Natalie. She found herself growing as fond of this enthusiastic little cousin as if she were Beth's elder sister.

Beth lay back in the corner of the carriage, then sat upright, and ended by tumbling over into Natalie's lap as they drove home. The November air was sharp, with the hint of snow in it, but it was June and rose-time to Beth in that carriage.

“I’m so happy, Natalie !” she cried. “It’s so lovely in New York, you can’t think unless you haven’t always been here ! And it’s so nice to drive in this dear carriage and look so pretty, and have all those lovely other fairy girls dancing all around you ! Isn’t it a queer thing that fairy stories aren’t half as nice, not near half as nice as what is true ?”

CHAPTER VI

"THE ISLAND DAY"

"IF you don't feel like going to church you may say so, Beth," said Mr. Cortlandt at the breakfast table.

"Oh, I do!" cried Beth. "I love to go to church. I like so very much to sing hymns. Sometimes I wish we could have hymns instead of a sermon, but Aunt Rebecca says that's all wrong. Of course you don't mind some sermons, but I do get crawly-creeps all over sometimes, when they last dreadfully long and are all about places and people with hard names. That kind always end up: 'You will see from this, my brethren,' but I don't see a thing from it, usually."

Uncle Jim laughed his merry laugh and Beth laughed, too.

"Everything is so different here, I suppose church won't be the same, either," she said.

"Well, we'll try it, if you're so disposed, Miss Bristead," said Uncle Jim.

"Come up-stairs, Beth; we must get ready," said Natalie, glancing at the clock as it chimed a happy little air, and then struck ten soft notes.

"Must I change my dress?" asked Beth glancing

downward at the soft blue cloth that was far prettier than her Sunday gown at home.

“Dear me, yes!” said Alys. “Why, that’s a morning house dress. You must wear your suit, Beth; not the long coat which you’d have to wear over this.”

“I wish we could have a Pilgrim party to church; I’d like to wear my Indian blanket there,” muttered Dirk wrathfully, with a presentiment of the discomfort of his coming starched collar.

Frieda made Beth proper in her blue suit, with its underlying hint of gray. Aunt Alida, artistically studying Beth’s eyes, had chosen blue in Beth’s new outfit wherever she could, but there were so many shades and kinds of the color that Beth wondered. Here was the blue of the sky in April, with a drooping hat of a lighter shade of the same blue, with long loops of ribbon velvet of a much darker shade, and a soft bunch of ostrich tips, like the ribbon, in the front. Beth saw that it was most becoming to her. She turned away from a long survey of the effect with a laugh and a blush.

“It is nice to be pretty, Frieda,” she said frankly. “I never was before, and I sha’n’t be when I go home, but while it lasts it is about the nicest thing in the world to be pretty.”

“You ought not to talk that way to Frieda, so confidently, Beth,” Alys rebuked her as they went to the elevator.

“Oh, Frieda knows; she saw the things Miss Tappan made for me, and she knows,” said Beth lightly. She was too content to mind what Alys thought, suddenly

feeling perfectly sure of herself. "I think it's silly to try to cover up anyway, Alys. People always see through you," she added.

Natalie laughed. "You're a funny little thing, Beth," she said. "Sometimes you seem about seven years old, and then you say something as old as sixteen—like that."

"It's because I've always been a good deal by myself. I think when you don't know many girls you keep little, yet then older people make you old, only differently," explained Beth, with correct understanding of her own case but not the clearest way of stating it.

She looked at Natalie, glowing in her brown cloth, with the tawny touch of red in her hat, and her soft brown furs, at Alys in sage green with her white hat and its green plumes, then she looked again at her own blue figure in the elevator mirrors. Aunt Alida was better than a fairy godmother; she certainly knew how to dress her girls.

In the hall below they found Dirk awaiting them, the image of Sunday correctness, brushed and shining in his dark clothes with his bright scarf, and an innocent look of peace on his round face that entirely misrepresented his state of mind.

The carriage was waiting and they heard Mr. Cortlandt hurrying his wife for the horses' sake; the wind was sharp. Pretty Aunt Alida came down the stairs all in soft gray, gown, coat, hat and furs. She swayed in a flower-like way as she walked; Beth thought there never was such a lovely creature. She thought it so

earnestly that her eyes declared her thought, and her Aunt Alida stooped to kiss her.

“We all look beautiful,” Beth said as her uncle came down also, in the dignity of long coat, gray gloves and gray tie. He threatened Beth with his silk hat.

“Get out with you, you base flatterer!” he cried, driving her before him down the steps.

The three girls sat opposite to Mrs. Cortlandt and her husband, Dirk between his father and mother.

“We shall have to get a three-seated family coach if these young women grow any larger,” said Mr. Cortlandt as the footman shut the door, and the horses began to move at an unwillingly decorous pace down the avenue.

It was a bright and beautiful avenue, alive with churchgoers, driving and afoot, and with gay turn-outs on their way to the park, on pleasure bent.

“You have not seen the park yet, Beth, nor the museums, nor Riverside Drive—you haven’t begun to have a good time yet,” cried Natalie, remembering how much there would be to show Beth.

“I should think I had begun to have a good time!” said Beth. “I began the moment I started for here with Anna Mary.”

It was not far to the church, not much over half a mile; Beth wondered why they had not walked to it. It was a great stone building; into its threefold entrance on the avenue a stream of beautifully dressed people was flowing. Beth fell back with Natalie to enter in the wake of her aunt and uncle and Alys and Dirk.

A shadowed beauty awed the child as she passed in. Soft light from the rose window over the door and from the long stained glass windows all along the body of the church seemed to Beth to be part of the soft harmonies with which the great organ bore them down the long avenue of the dim aisle.

Dirk contrived to be first in the pew, at the head of which Mr. Cortlandt halted to admit his family. Beth came next, then Alys, Natalie, with Mrs. Cortlandt next to her husband at the end. Instead of the pulpit at which Beth was accustomed to look up, with its table below it and its high backed chairs flanking it, here was a beautiful altar, flower burdened, backed by a window through which the light fell as if heaven were but dimly veiled. There were noble carved stalls in row upon row within the inclosure of a rail before the altar, their dark wood contrasting perfectly with the gold and bronze-touched wall of strong, rich coloring.

Was this indeed a church? the little visitor wondered. It was no more like the Centre Church to which she had trudged beside Aunt Rebecca all her short life than Uncle Jim's palace of a house was like Aunt Rebecca's brown clapboarded house. Beth did not dare think of fairies as at work on a church; it must be that their work was supplemented by angels here, but it was all one in its dream-like beauty with the fairy-land in which she was dwelling this wonder-winter.

They were in good time for Beth to see all this before the service, but hardly had she taken it in than she

heard the sound of singing, faint, yet clear and sweet, like a thread of sound dropped down from heaven to earth. It scarcely surprised Beth that she should hear the angels singing, since the miraculous was now her daily experience, but she held her breath to lose nothing of their strains, and the tears sprang to her eyes for the joy of it.

Then the congregation arose with a surge of silken garments, doors at the head of the side aisle swung open, the music swelled into a full burst of melody with articulate words, and a stream of white-robed little boys, larger boys, big boys and men, filed into the church, singing, singing as Beth had never heard any one sing before. She could not remember to be disappointed that these were the voices of men, and not of angels, so heavenly beautiful was their singing. On they came, the wee boys holding a hymn-book that looked too heavy for their chubby hands, raising their soft eyebrows into acute angles in the earnestness of their efforts, with pure, clear child voices singing marvelously. Then there came a boy walking alone, a boy about as old as Beth. His voice soared up and up, high above all the others, singing deliciously, so sweet, so touchingly sweet, that not only Beth's but many older eyes were wet with the emotion its sweetness called forth. Then the lovely boy altos streamed by; then the tenors and the basses of the men, holding up the children's voices as the stone columns of the church held up its vaulted roof. Behind their choristers came the clergymen, robed also, and solemn, and

the service began. Beth could not follow it, but she listened to the musical reading, the chanting, the bursts of responsive chanting from the choristers, who had ranged themselves in the dark carved stalls on each side of the altar.

No chance here for a little girl to sing her beloved hymns, but Beth could not regret it, for here was music that left no room for regret, nor wishing.

The sermon was short, too, and one that Beth understood and liked. She thought that the service was not going to be long enough, but Dirk evidently was not agreeing with her. Beth felt him fidgeting at her side, and at last she received a pinch that made her jump and barely keep from crying out. She turned red with pain and anger, and threw Dirk a look of such hurt reproach that he reddened in his turn, looking as ashamed as he properly should have been.

"Just for fun," he whispered by way of apology, but Beth shook her head hard. Dirk understood that she meant that a pinch that hurt as that one did was not her idea of fun anywhere, least of all in church.

When the service was over once more the congregation arose with the rustle of silks and waves of perfume, and the choristers went away as they had come, white garments swaying as they sang and sang, the sound dying away in the distance into silence with a far-off "Amen," as it had grown out of that silence and had swelled into beauty in their coming.

With a sigh that it was all over, Beth turned to follow her cousins out of the pew. Alys was im-

mediately before her, and as she started to step into the aisle, she tripped and almost fell. She turned furiously upon Dirk, who was that moment pressing past Beth in his haste to get out. Alys's face was crimson, her eyes blazed with anger, she raised her hand, but, remembering where she was, dropped it again and continued her way out of the church in a towering rage.

“We are going to walk home, lassies,” announced Mr. Cortlandt over his shoulder to his daughters and his niece. Beth was glad of this. The sun had brightened while they were in church, and the avenue was filled with two streams of story-book people, beautifully dressed, gay, prosperous-looking, handsome. It was a joy to Beth to be one of the children who were part of the crowd, moving visions, surpassing the loveliest in Miss Tappan's books in the far-off, humdrum days.

When they had reached home and Beth came running down-stairs after she had laid off coat and hat, she found her aunt looking troubled and her uncle talking sternly to Dirk in the library.

“You shall certainly be punished, sir,” he said. “If it is amusing to you to trip up your sister you must be taught not to amuse yourself. Fancy Alys almost falling in church because a great boy of ten tripped her!”

Dirk looked sullen; his face was dark red; he frowned fearfully. Beth knew in an instant that Alys had thought that Dirk had been responsible for her accident in leaving the pew, and had complained to her

father that her brother might be punished. In the little time that she had been in this household Beth had discovered that her uncle took a hopeless view of Dirk, and was ready to believe him guilty whenever he was accused, on the general ground of past experience.

"Oh, Uncle Jim!" she cried, "Dirk isn't to blame for Alys's tripping! I know exactly what he was doing, and he didn't have a thing to do with that, truly."

"Then what did I trip on?" demanded Alys, who had been enjoying Dirk's discomfiture.

"I don't know, Alys, but Dirk didn't do one single thing to you. He was—he was right behind me, and I know," cried Beth. She did not say that Dirk was pinching her again, but this was the case.

"Why didn't you say so, Dirk?" demanded his father.

"What's the use?" sulked Dirk.

"I shouldn't think you'd take his part, Beth; he hasn't been very nice to you since you came," said Alys.

"Well, I suppose he doesn't like me; everybody can't like everybody—every other body, I mean," said Beth. "I don't think that has anything to do with what's fair. And I do know Dirk didn't trip you."

"That's the right spirit, Lady Beth!" cried Mr. Cortlandt heartily, as Mrs. Cortlandt said:

"Oh, I'm glad, little son, you weren't unkind to your sister!"

"I beg your pardon, Dirk, for pitching into you without hearing your side first," said Mr. Cortlandt,

speaking as one man speaks to another. “Shake hands, Dirk.”

“Oh, that’s all right; I don’t mind. I did something else,” muttered Dirk giving his father a limp little hand.

After dinner he came upon Beth alone in the library.

“Say, you’re all right,” he began in some embarrassment. “I ain’t going to forget what you did.”

“Well, you didn’t trip up Alys,” said Beth.

“No, but I pinched you like fury in church, and I was pinching you when she slipped up. I guess most girls would have let me take what was coming to me, and be glad I got it. I won’t bother you any more; I wish you were my sister and Alys was my cousin. I ain’t going to forget it, Beth Bristead, and if you want anything any time, say so,” said Dirk.

“I want something now,” said Beth with a little laugh. “I want you to show you’re nice, instead of trying to make everybody think you’re horrid.”

“Oh, come off!” said Dirk much embarrassed, but inwardly pleased. “I guess I ain’t going to pretend.”

“All right, then it’s a bargain,” Beth triumphed. “And I’m glad it all happened, because that’s exactly what you do every minute—pretend you’re a rude, disagreeable boy, and I know better! I’m awfully glad you’ll stop pretending, Dirk!”

“Oh, say!” exclaimed Dirk. But he grinned, for there was no denying that Beth had the best of him.

Natalie and Alys came into the room. “Now we’re going to show you the house, Beth,” Natalie announced.

"You've seen this library and the dining-room, and that's all you have seen, down-stairs. On this side of the hall is the drawing-room." Natalie threw open the door as she spoke, and Beth cried out delightedly.

The floor, inlaid in beautiful woods, was partly covered with rugs of the finest colors and textures—before the fireplace lay a great tiger skin. The walls were hung with silken tapestries of green and silver, the furniture "did not match," Beth noticed in surprise; there was gold, dull enough to accord with the silver; there was white, and there were rare woods, and there were cushions and upholstering of the same green as the walls and of darker shades of the same tone. Beth did not know why it was such a beautiful room. She did know that she had never seen one so splendid.

"This is the conservatory," said Alys, leading the way. And there off the drawing-room, Beth found herself "knee deep in June," in a conservatory filled with bloom and with the green of the tropics, its damp, rose-scented air seeming, most of all that Beth had seen in this wonder house, the work of fairies on this chill November day.

"This is father's billiard room," said Dirk who had followed the girls.

"Beth won't care for that," said Alys. "This is the music room. We've come around a square; that door across there leads back into the library."

The music room was vaulted, finished in dark woods, paneled from floor to ceiling. One end of it was occupied by a great organ, built into the wall; a piano,

harp and several small instruments rested against the walls at intervals.

“Can you play them all?” gasped Beth, wide-eyed with awe.

Natalie laughed. “No, indeed, but mama gives musicales in the winter, and she has people come who can play them. This is the picture gallery.”

“All these?” murmured Beth vaguely.

This was a long room, its walls covered with green; a railing ran around it three or four feet from the wall. Pictures and still more pictures hung from floor to ceiling against these walls, and rare marbles and bronzes stood on pedestals in spaces built for them against heavy draperies that threw into relief their perfect loveliness, their glorious strength. Beth did not know that her uncle’s collection of paintings and sculpture was famous in the city, but she dimly understood that here was a world of beauty whose existence she had never guessed.

“Oh, me,” she sighed gratefully, “what a lot of things there are to know, and what a happy world it is!”

“Mama will tell you about the pictures some day,” said Natalie. “Father will, if he finds you can learn to love them. He doesn’t like to waste time on people who never could care for them. Now come up-stairs and see the ballroom. That is built out over all these rooms, the music room, the billiard room and this gallery.

“Turn on the lights, Alys; it is getting dusky, and anyway this room is best by electricity,” said Natalie

as they paused in the great arched doorway of a room so big, so splendid that this time Beth could not so much as breathe as she looked down its great length. It was a room all white and gold as to walls; its high paneled ceiling was painted with a design of flowers and long, eddying links of Greek maidens in floating draperies and happy children and birds flying; the painted poem of beautiful motion. Against the doors and windows hung curtains of deep-hued golden silk and velvet; the polished floor reflected the countless lights that flashed from the cut-glass chandeliers. At one end of the room was a screened balcony for musicians and around it at intervals were deep recessed niches, resting places for dancers, while luxurious and curious seats stood about, to offer hospitality to on-lookers. There were galleries for like purpose on three sides of the room.

"Do you use it?" asked Beth in a whisper.

"We haven't had anything here for two winters," said Natalie. "Mama says we may dance here Thanksgiving night, when we have the costume party. When I come out—just think, it will be in three years, Beth!—we are going to have a ball that is going to be a dream. You can be planning your gown till it comes off, Beth."

"I shall be at home then," said Beth wistfully.

"Well, I rather think you will be here!" declared Natalie. "Now we've found you we aren't going to lose you, little cousin, and you will be at my coming-out party, even if you aren't old enough to be out yourself."

“We’d better leave the gymnasium till another time,” said Alys. “Beth has seen all there is now, except the rooms in the basement, and the gymnasium.”

“Do you suppose there is another house in New York as splendid as this one?” asked Beth overcome by the wonders displayed to her.

“Oh, yes; finer,” said Natalie. “But there are a good many not so fine.”

“I don’t see, Natalie, how you can ever be good enough,” said Beth solemnly.

Alys laughed, but Natalie said: “Sometimes I feel that, too, Beth. I hope I can use it all as I ought. Mama tries to have us remember we’ve got to do a great deal more than just enjoy our wealth. It is hard not to forget, and take it all just as Jack Horner took the plum.”

“Off in a corner and thinking how good he was!” cried Beth quickly. “You won’t be that kind, Natalie!”

“Do you like my house, Beth?” asked Mr. Cortlandt when Beth came alone into the library after her tour to find him, sitting with a book laid face upon his knee, looking into the fire.

“It is like Jerusalem the Golden,” said Beth seriously. “‘I know not, oh, I know not what joys await me there.’ There’s no palace in all the stories I ever read half so wonderful, Uncle Jim! I can’t think I’m really seeing.”

“You look like your mother, Beth,” said her uncle unexpectedly, as he watched the earnest little face.

"No one ever told me about her, Uncle Jim," said Beth coming over to perch on his knee as a matter of course. "Will you tell me about her, please? It would be nice for Sunday night."

"There are two lines of Jean Ingelow's that I always think of when I think of her," said Uncle Jim.

" 'A sweeter woman ne'er drew breath
Than my son's wife, Elizabeth.' "

Only she was my sister and not an Elizabeth. Do you like Sunday night, little Beth?" asked her uncle stroking her soft cheek.

"Oh, yes," said Beth. "I think Sunday is like an island day, with all the other days rolling around it, like waves, while it is all still and peaceful. This has been a dear Sunday, Uncle Jim. Will you tell me more about my mother, more than those lovely lines, please?"

"Yes. Put your head on my shoulder and I will tell you about her," said Beth's uncle. "I loved her dearly, dearly, and so did every one else."

They talked for a long time in the gathering darkness, lighted only by the flames of the wood-fire, leaping and falling in the sombre beauty of the library. Here Mrs. Cortlandt found them when she came downstairs later, both of them pensively happy in the memory of Beth's sweet mother, whom she had never known.

CHAPTER VII

PILGRIMS AND STRANGERS

THE next morning Beth opened her eyes upon a chill gray world. She jumped out of bed and into her cuddly bedroom slippers and drew aside her window curtains. The asphalt pavement seemed to have spread out and up over the whole sky ; air, clouds, people and city walls looked of a piece and a color with the hard iron-gray road, giving the avenue the effect of an asphalt tube, bottom, sides and top alike. Snow-flakes drifted through the air as if they did not half like it and found it too bleak to call down their comrades to make a cheerful snow-storm.

Beth remembered that it was Monday morning and that Aunt Rebecca and Ella Lowndes had deep-seated objections to bad weather on washing day, "because it made the whole week crooked." She hoped that the sun was shining in Massachusetts, and her heart leaped joyously as she realized that she was in fairy-land-come-true, where there were no washing days with their hurried, light dinners, but where the sun always shone, no matter what was the weather. Her feet in their fleecy blue slippers danced a few steps until the lavish blue satin bows on the slippers waved blithely, and she hurried to begin dressing, meaning to surprise Frieda when she came by being nearly ready.

There was to be a holiday from lessons for the Cortlandt children because it was Thanksgiving week. Alys said "that was a good way to make sure they were thankful."

After breakfast Beth found herself alone, and she wandered into the conservatory. Entering it was to leave November far behind, to breathe the warm, soft dampness of the southern midsummer. Beth closed the door behind her and stood still, delicately and ecstatically sniffing the fragrant air.

"It's just like a hymn," said Beth, folding her hands with a sense of reverence and lifting her happy little face higher as she spoke aloud after the fashion of her solitary play days. "It's like:

" 'What though the spicy breezes
Blow soft o'er Ceylon's isle,
Though every prospect pleases,
And only man is vile'—

Mercy, no! It isn't like that last part one bit, for Uncle Jim isn't any more vile than—than nothing at all—than those white carnations over there! I love him with all my heart and soul! I guess it's more like:

" 'And Sharon waves, in solemn praise
Her silent groves of palm,'

because there are whole rows of palms over there. Well, at any rate, I just wish Janie Little could smell

these flowers. Janie loves nice smells so! She thinks smelling a peppermint stick is 'most as good as sucking it. I don't, but I'd rather smell all these flowers mixed up than pick them. And those birds! I wonder who feeds them."

"I do, my dear," said a voice, and Beth faced about with a jump to see Mrs. Hodgman.

"Do you take care of all of them? Good-morning, Mrs. Hodgman," said Beth.

The housekeeper laughed. "Good-morning, Beth," she said. "I have one of the maids, or sometimes the gardener here to help me take down the cages, but I give the little creatures their baths and food—it's such a pleasure to do it, and they all know me."

She whistled a low note and the canaries nearest her, of the fifty that hung in the conservatory, fluttered to the bars of their cages and answered her, with their heads inquiringly tilted to see what Mrs. Hodgman had for them.

"Oh, I should think it would be a pleasure!" cried Beth rapturously. "It makes you feel as if you would write poetry to be in this warm, soft, flowery place with all those birds hopping and singing, doesn't it? I feel as if poetry would just burst right out—only it doesn't! Do you call the man who grows flowers in a greenhouse a gardener? I was wondering what you would call him."

"The man who has charge of this conservatory is the gardener transferred from Mr. Cortlandt's country house, otherwise we might call him the florist," said

Mrs. Hodgman. "Now, my dear, I must leave you, for Mrs. Cortlandt gives a small dinner to-night, and I have much to look after this morning."

"Do you think I may stay here a while, all alone with the birds, and would you mind not telling any one I was here? Because I should like very much to play something. It would be that I was a kind of enchantress who could turn a bare day like this into a summer day on a magic island, and all these birds and flowers would be under the spell, obey me, you see, and I'd play they all knew me and were bright and beautiful—as they truly are—but nobody could see them, or get on the island unless I touched them with my wand, and I never touched any one unless they had done something lovely and kind to earn the touch," explained Beth, feeling that she owed Mrs. Hodgman the explanation if she asked to be left alone by her. "I could play it better if I knew no one knew where I was; it makes it more like a secret, invisible island."

"Bless you, little Beth, you may stay here as long as you like, and play all the pretty fancies you can fashion," said Mrs. Hodgman heartily, kissing the round, soft cheek turned up to her. Then she hurried away, leaving Beth to a glorious kingdom of fact and fancy.

This was why no one could tell Beth's Aunt Alida where the little girl was when she wanted her an hour later, for Mrs. Hodgman had gone out and nobody else had seen her. The household had begun to get excited when Mrs. Cortlandt remembered that nobody had looked in the conservatory for Beth, and she hurried

down herself to try this last hope of finding the child in the house.

As she opened the door Beth's happy face met her eyes, flushed with the warmth of the conservatory and her interest in her fascinating game. She looked so rapt that Mrs. Cortlandt forgot that she had been anxious about her and cried out :

"Why, you funny little Bethie ! What are you doing here by your serene self, and why do you look as if you were floating on little pink clouds, child ?"

"I've been having such a lovely time, Aunt Alida !" said Beth, coming down to facts by an effort. "I've been playing this was a magic island. It's wonderful to play things right in the middle of things more fairy than your play is ! To have all these birds and flowers true when it's so cold and snowy ! Aunt Alida, your real fairy-land is nicer than book fairy-land !"

"Dear little girl, the best of all is to have the eyes that see fairy-land anywhere," said Aunt Alida, kissing Beth just as Mrs. Hodgman had kissed her.

Beth had never been kissed in all her life as much as she had been since she had come to New York, Aunt Rebecca not being prone to kisses, but she liked it very much and responded with a warmth that showed she was learning how to show the love that filled her heart.

"I've been looking for you, Beth," Aunt Alida said, "because we have important matters to decide, you and I. You know that our costume party is almost beginning—Thursday is Thanksgiving day—and we have nothing ready for you to wear. I think I shall make

you into nothing more alarming than a little Puritan maiden, Bethie. The kerchief and cap will suit your serious little face. Will it also suit your serious little taste, dear ? ”

Beth laughed. “ I don’t know what it will be like, Aunt Alida, but you know what’s nice for me. I’m afraid to go to your party, Aunt Alida ; I’m afraid of people I don’t know.”

“ Nonsense, Beth ! You will know these boys and girls when you’ve met them, so who will there be to fear ? Alys is to wear a stiff brocade, copied after an old portrait of a Cortlandt of the early 1700’s ; we think Alys will rather suit the stiff old gown. And—here’s a secret, Beth ! Natalie is to be a young and pretty witch, all in crimson, with a black bodice. And we are going to have a dance which Natalie is to lead alone, all the others following her. The dance will represent the hunting of a witch in the foolish, cruel old days. Do you think that is a fine idea, little niece ? I’m proud of it, for it is my own.”

“ Oh, yes,” breathed Beth, bewildered but impressed.

“ Then come along, Bethie, and try on your costume,” cried Aunt Alida triumphantly. “ I ordered it several days ago and the dressmaker has sent a woman to try it on ; she is waiting in your room. You can’t imagine what fun it is to have three big-little girls to gown for a costume party ! It’s like having one’s dolls come back a thousand times nicer than they used to be.”

She tucked Beth’s hand under her arm and hurried her to the elevator and up to her room. A woman

arose as they entered, holding in her hands a soft gray-blue silken gown, straight and full as to skirt, long and plain as to waist, with delicate muslin sleeves appearing under the silken ones, and a soft muslin kerchief swinging from its shoulders, ready to be crossed over Beth's palpitating heart. Surely she had been mistaken in thinking this a dull, dreary day, Beth said to herself, and surely the land of magic was not imaginary, nor bounded by the glass walls of the conservatory!

"Hallo, Priscilla!" called a gay voice, and Beth turned to see Natalie's eyes dancing at her from out the folds of the portière between her cousin's dressing room and her own. "You can't see me, but I can see you!" laughed Natalie. "You're not to see me until the great day—you dear little Priscilla! You're too sweet to be real. Bethie, I'd come and hug you and find out if you were real, only I can't without showing you my gown."

"I'm real," said Beth. "I look like a picture in the glass, but pictures can't curtsy, Natalie. Look!" She took her soft gown on each side between a thumb and forefinger and curtsied solemnly and low. Her face was all rosy pink and her eyes shining with delight. "If only Aunt Rebecca could see me!" she sighed. "She loves our Puritan ancestors so, and she'd never believe how I look."

"She shall see you!" cried Aunt Alida. "I'll tell you what we'll do, Bethie. We'll have a miniature of you painted on ivory, just as you look this moment, and we'll send it to your Aunt Rebecca for Christmas! No photograph could do justice to those soft tints."

"Painted? Of me?" gasped Beth. "Aunt Rebecca has a miniature; she says it's her grandfather Bowen's second wife; she was a Southerner. It's perfectly lovely. Aunt Alida, I'll have to stop talking to you, because I can't say new things when you do new things! Only I'm most sure Aunt Rebecca will say it's ministering to my vanity to have my picture painted; she always was afraid Miss Tappan would make me vain if she trimmed my dresses much—she always told her not to minister to my vanity. But Miss Tappan doesn't know how to make people look fine enough to be really vain—you do, Aunt Alida! Still, I don't feel spoiled; I just feel—happy!"

Once more Aunt Alida kissed Beth, and the little girl felt sure that the dressmaker's woman gave her hair a slight caress as she took off the lovable Puritan gown to which Beth had lost her heart completely.

On the great night of what Beth liked to call in her thoughts "her first ball," Thanksgiving night, Beth stood before the mirror in her beautiful blue room while Frieda fastened the silvery blue gown that fell to Beth's slippered feet, and laid over her shoulders the soft white fichu, and fastened on her flowing hair the tiny lace cap that added the last touch and turned Beth into something between her own ancestress and a great doll.

"Oh, oh, oh!" gasped Beth. "I don't see how they ever let the Puritans leave England if they wore such things! Isn't it the dearest, be-eau-ti-fulest gown, Frieda? Come in," she added in reply

to a knock, and Anna Mary presented herself in the doorway.

"Mrs. Cortlandt sent me up to make sure everything was as it should be," she said. "Frieda, have you that bit of a cap fastened strong? With Miss Beth's hair flyin' like the corn silk that bit of a fairy gossamer thing will get away from it like a cobweb on the grass of a May morning. Just a taste more of fold in that lace fish-u," added Anna Mary bringing the lace closer around Beth's round throat and pronouncing the syllables carefully. "What do you represent now, Miss Beth? It looks ancient."

"I'm Priscilla Alden," said Beth proudly. "I'll tell you," she went on as Anna Mary knelt to sew a little tuck under the broad tuck of Beth's skirt in a spot where it was too long. "Priscilla was so lovely that Captain Miles Standish loved her, but he didn't dare say so, so he sent John Alden—he was a nice young man near Priscilla's age—to ask her to marry him, but Priscilla saw John liked her himself, so she asked him why he didn't 'speak for yourself, John,' and I suppose he did, because they were married."

"Now it hangs straight," said Anna Mary, bending down to bite off her thread and coming up so purple in the face that Beth felt apologetic. "And that's a foolish story, Miss Beth, if you don't mind my sayin' so. There's no captain I've ever seen at home in Ireland—and I've seen plenty—would be sendin' a boy to do his wooin' for him. Let me look how Frieda's got it in the back, that fish-u."

"It's a lovely story, Anna Mary; I must have told it bad —— Oh, oh, oh, Natalie! Just look at Natalie!" screamed Beth, forgetting all about the Pilgrim lovers as Natalie appeared in the doorway, holding back the portière. All in crimson and black was Natalie, short skirt, high heeled shoes, pointed hat, black and crimson, with a crimson satin cloak floating from one shoulder. She was so brilliant of color, so radiantly handsome that the two maids shared Beth's enthusiasm.

"Sure they never hung such witches, Miss Natalie!" cried Anna Mary.

Alys followed her sister. Beth and the maids were not able to appreciate the perfection of her copy of an old portrait in brocades and laces, still they saw that Alys's gown was most beautiful. But Natalie's glorious dark beauty in the witch costume of shining red silk swept everything before it.

"We must hurry down, if you're ready, little cousin," said Natalie, and Beth found herself descending to the lower floor in the small elevator in the wonderful company of a great lady of the seventeenth century and such a witch as Anna Mary truly said had never been hung on Boston Common.

Aunt Alida came to meet them. "You dear, satisfactory trio!" she cried. "If you'll have as good a time as you look—dear me! That's a queer sentence! However, I mean I'll be delighted if you are as happy as you are nice to look at, little daughters and niece. Jim, Jim, do come here and see our Court Lady, our Priscilla—and our witch."

Beth caught the slight emphasis that Aunt Alida put on the last three words, and hoped that Alys would not notice it. Uncle Jim beamed on them, all three; it seemed to Beth that Uncle Jim cared more for the frolic than for his elder daughter's beauty. "There's Dirk!" cried Beth. There *was* Dirk in doublet, boots and a sword.

"What are you?" asked Beth eagerly.

"I'm a fool to let 'em get me such togs," growled Dirk. "Mama says I'm Miles Standish. Search me! I don't know what I look like! Say, though, Beth, the sword's decent, ain't it?"

"You look fine, Dirk," cried Beth, and Dirk could not detect mockery in her honest eyes.

No one could hear what they said so the boy unbent a little to her sweetness. "You're a peach," he said earnestly. "You look like one of the kids they take out in the mall, in that long dress and baby cap. But you're out of sight, all right. I guess I'll dance with you, 'cause I've got to dance with somebody and you're the best there is."

"Yes; I'd rather dance with you," agreed Beth. "When are they coming?"

"Who? The rest of the show? Some of 'em are here now, getting their things off, and ——"

"Oh, there's the music!" cried Beth, as the small orchestra of strings began to play in the music room.

"Sure. They'll put 'em in the ballroom when the time comes," said Dirk, wondering to see the rapture in Beth's eyes.

After that Beth hardly knew what happened. She floated on the lovely music through an enchanted region, into which there began to come quaint and beautiful figures, some of them tall and nearly grown up, like Natalie, some of them midway, like Alys, some of them small like herself; figures in strange, picture garments that made them seem unreal, even when they were introduced to her by her cousins and she found herself dancing with them. Because it was a dream and she was not really Beth Bristead!

Beth was not shy and afraid as she had expected to be. She danced down and around the great ballroom, carried along by that fairy music, so happy that there was no room for fear. Never had she heard such music, trod such a slippery floor, reflecting hundreds of lights, making the space under her feet as brilliant as the high ceiling. She could not be afraid of the children whom she met in fairy-land! So Beth smiled blissfully at them all and answered happily when they spoke to her, feeling as if these strangers in old-time costume were all old friends.

She had no idea of how proudly, with what pleasure her aunt and uncle watched her, nor that Natalie and Alys had to acknowledge many kind speeches made by the older girls about their pretty little cousin. She did not know that Dirk's gloom was increasing; she hardly knew that she was happy, because she was so full of happiness that there was not room left for knowing it. A blissful little Beth, she danced through an evening of hours which she had never before sat up to

see, floating through fairy-land on the wings of fairy music.

Dirk looked sullen and cross when he came to take Beth to supper, but Beth did not see it.

"Oh, Dirk," she sighed, "isn't it lovely, lovely! There's a book at home, an old history all full of pictures, and it's just as if they had come to life! Yet I think it's more as if the garden had come alive. And the music! I feel as if I was a little pink cloud! You know; the kind that is so fluffy and looks so happy when it blows along in the sunset."

"Well, I'm glad you like it!" growled Dirk disgustedly. "If ever you catch me toggling out like this again! It's hotter'n fury in this double-thing-doublet! And even the sword bothers the life out of me. If I was up in the gym and had some of the fellers I could get some good out of this sword. Come on, Beth; we'll have a supper anyhow that'll be big enough to bust this old doublet—wish 'twould!"

"Oh, Dirk; I thought everybody was having such a lovely time; I'm so sorry! But you will have a good time when we dance the dance that Natalie leads, the one that means chasing the witch, won't you?" cried Beth falling into line with her discontented cousin for the supper march.

"Not on your life!" returned Dirk glumly.

In the supper room Beth forgot Dirk as soon as he had gone to get her refreshments, for here was another realm of enchantments. There were clear soups in fairy cups, cold turkey, salads, dear little triangles

enclosing turkey or lettuce ; a sort of unearthly delicate bread, cakes such as no mere mortal could have made, of which Ella Lowndes would never dare to dream on her baking day, little cakes iced in all colors, flavored by fairies with unknown, haunting flavors. There were ices in the form of little turkeys, as a reminder of the day, and chocolate with whipped cream on its surface, served in cups that were surely flowers changed by enchantment into porcelain. In the middle of the table stood a mammoth turkey and when everybody had had all and more than they could possibly eat Natalie, as the witch, was called upon to cast a spell upon him and make him give up his treasures.

So Natalie thrice waved her witch's stick around his head, and the mammoth turkey, by some secret magic, spread his wings and showered upon the table bonbons, snapping mottoes, little flags and candies that looked like cranberries, but which proved to be something beyond and above the flavor of any candy that Beth had ever tasted.

Then the music called "the Pilgrims and Strangers," as Uncle Jim dubbed his young guests in their ancient gowns, back to the dance. Beth went gladly, delicious though the feast had been. Never in her life before had she danced except around a crowded parlor at home with one of the little girls as partner while another played for their dancing tingling tunes with an unvaried bass. This vast room, ice-smooth floor, these throbbing violins, 'cellos, and harps—ah, that made dancing another matter !

"Happy, Bethie?" asked Aunt Alida, detaining Beth for an instant as she passed her, moving with a light, floating step of her own to the exquisite music that recalled the guests.

"Oh, happy, Aunt Alida! You think we're all awake, don't you? I'm so afraid I'll wake up!" said Beth leaning her head against Aunt Alida's pale gray gown. "What do you represent, auntie dearest? Are you anything historical or Thanksgivingy?"

"It is only the children who represent something, Bethie. This isn't my party, you know; I'm not a part of the party. But perhaps I represent Plymouth Rock—I'm nearly its color," laughed Aunt Alida.

Beth found herself one of the last to enter the ball-room after she had kissed Aunt Alida and hurried on. Dirk was looking for her, for they were to be partners in this merry witch chase. The children were paired and drawn up in a long line with beautiful Natalie at their head. Beth and Dirk slipped into their places in the line, the few stragglers were summoned, and all was ready.

The orchestra burst forth in a strain of wild, sweet, strange music which Beth did not know was Hungarian, but which she dimly felt harmonized with Natalie's crimson figure as she darted forward in a swinging, swift dance-step down the room. The others followed her at a signal, giving her a good start. Then Natalie "led them a dance" indeed!

Up and down, over, across, straight, zigzagging, darting, turning, Natalie danced, and ever following her

came the pretty line of boys and girls in their quaint costumes, following as if Natalie were a sort of Pied Piper and they were her victims, or as though she were a witch, indeed, who had bewitched them.

Faster and faster the thrilling music rose, faster and faster Natalie led her winding pursuers, till at last, at a signal from Mrs. Cortlandt, the whole long train broke and spread out, encircling Natalie and taking her captive.

"The witch! We've caught the witch! What shall we do with her?" cried Dirk who had long ago forgotten his dislike of costumes and had danced the game-dance with gusto.

"Burn her! Hang her! Set her free! Hold her! Make her pay her forfeit!" cried various voices. They all turned to Mrs. Cortlandt for her verdict; she was to decide what should be the witch's sentence.

"If she can lead you in singing as she has in dancing she shall go free!" cried Natalie's mother.

The orchestra began to play "My Country 'Tis of Thee," and Natalie began to sing. She had a sweet, clear young voice and she was fully able to redeem herself. The dancers followed her in this, as they had in dancing. It was a pretty chorus. But a strange thing happened. One by one the singers fell silent as they failed to remember the words. Only Beth, out of her careful training in such things in her old, so-different home in the Massachusetts hills, knew the anthem quite to the end. She sang it fearlessly in her sweet little voice, like a little song sparrow. And the

Thanksgiving dance ended with Beth in her soft, silvery blue Priscilla gown singing "My Country 'Tis of Thee," standing amid the silent circle of costumed young "Pilgrims and Strangers," her happy, flushed little round face uplifted, her heart overflowing with true Thanksgiving gratitude and love. And Uncle Jim, watching the child, said under his breath: "God bless the dear little soul!"

CHAPTER VIII

TANAGERS AND BLUEBIRDS

“YOU haven’t had your gym suit on once, Beth-ikins !” said Natalie reproachfully.

“Oh, yes, I have ; I tried it on the minute it came—the minute I got off my dress to go to bed the night it came,” Beth corrected herself with her usual painstaking fidelity to the exact letter of the truth.

“Trying on doesn’t count ; you haven’t worn it,” said Alys.

“Trying on counted a lot to me,” Beth corrected her. “It’s like a bluebird.”

“Funny you said that ! Mama said we could be the Tanagers and Bluebirds, our gym club. All the girls must wear crimson or blue,” cried Natalie.

“All the girls ?” echoed Beth inquiringly. “Do you have outside girls in it ? I’d be afraid to try if strange girls come.”

“Our best friends come,” said Alys. “We have a perfectly magnificent instructor and our gymnasium is better than the other girls have—most of them haven’t one at all—so mama lets us have the girls here and form a club.”

“You needn’t be afraid of that lot, Beth,” Dirk said

derisively. "They're not much at it. I bet you'll show 'em something after you get the hang of it. You walk like a kid that could do gym stunts. Yes, they ask the girls in, but I can't ask any of the fellows! What do you know about that? I practice with 'em, 'cause father wants me to get the lessons when Bob Leonard's here, but not a boy but me in it! Tanagers and Bluebirds! Well, I guess! Sparrows, that's what! I wear black."

"Who's Bob Leonard? That can't be a girl?" asked Beth, suppressing a desire to laugh.

"It is Mr. Robert Leonard, our teacher," said Alys, looking severely at her unabashed brother. "He was a great—athletic, or whatever you call it——"

"Athlete," Natalie corrected.

"Athlete, then, at college. His father lost his money and Mr. Leonard has to teach and do things like that, while he is studying law. Dirk, mama dislikes you to be impertinent."

"Who is?" demanded Dirk. "Bob Leonard suits him. You can't go around mistering a fine chap like him. He can do anything; he's awful strong and clean-cut. Besides, he likes it. Bob Leonard's the way to speak of him; I'll leave it to Beth after she sees him. Girls are the limit! They think you're fresh if you don't mister every one. It's the people you like you treat like that, that's dead easy to see."

Beth felt a return of the vague regret that she had felt before. Now that the first dazzling wonder of her new surroundings was somewhat less blinding she be-

gan to wish that Dirk meant a little more to his sisters. Natalie was sweet temper itself ; she did not often find fault with Dirk, as Alys was only too ready to do at the slightest provocation. But Natalie treated him with kindly indifference, as if a small boy mattered little and must be left to himself until he found his way into big boyhood, when he might matter. Dirk was always on the defensive toward the girls and often was on the offensive. Beth knew that the three were really fond of one another, but it troubled her tender little heart that they sometimes scarcely seemed so.

"I'll like the gymnasium—if I'm not afraid. Maybe Dirk will start me in it?" she said with the smile that Dirk inwardly felt was irresistible. The wistful look in her eyes, born of her regret for the sharpness Alys and Dirk showed each other, made the boy say promptly :

"I'll see you through, Beth ; you stick to me. I'm a cracker-jack on the bar, if I do say it."

"Better get ready, Bethie," advised Natalie. "Mr. Leonard comes in an hour."

Beth ran away on this hint to her own room where she found Frieda reading. The girl arose when Beth entered and said apologetically :

"I seemed to have nothing to do, Miss Beth, so I was reading a little. I've tightened all the buttons on everything you have ready made and there's nothing needs mending yet."

"I should think those German letters would be as hard to read as it would be to sew pine boards together," said Beth, missing the point of Frieda's apology.

"I've got to put on my gymnasium suit, Frieda. I don't think I knew it was regular lessons; I thought the gymnasium was just for fun. Natalie says they're taught. I'm glad now Aunt Alida bought the suit. Anything was good enough to play in, but a regular teacher is different."

"Oh, sure, Miss Beth," said Frieda with conviction as she hastened to get out Beth's gymnasium uniform, "it's all different from that. There's nothing here that anything you happen to have is good enough for; it's all got to be just the way it ought to be."

"Isn't that true, Frieda!" cried Beth, struck by this summing up of what had amazed her.

She regarded her slender legs admiringly as they appeared, like slender black stems out of particularly full calyxes, below the puffy dark blue silk bloomers which she had donned. "I'm afraid my great-aunt Rebecca, at home, would not think this was a nice costume. She says a great deal about being feminine in all your ways. Maybe she'd think bloomers were not feminine—though in the pictures of Turkish ladies they always wear them and have their heads tied up so you can only see their eyes. They must think noses and mouths aren't feminine there."

Frieda had long ago given up even the hope of following the course of Beth's rapid thoughts; she wisely confined herself now to the main point as she replied:

"Wait till you get the tunic on, Miss Beth. It's just a regular dress."

It was and a remarkably pretty one. It fitted the

round, childish slenderness to perfection, falling softly in deep silken pleats below the knee bands of the doubtful bloomers. Deep Van Dyck points of lace formed a collar and, reversed, made effective cuffs on the sleeves. A cap with a jaunty feather was the unnecessary last touch of completeness.

"It won't stay on," said Beth, surveying herself with undisguised delight in the long mirror. "But it's the loveliest cap ever! I feel just like Claverhouse with the Bonnets of Bonny Dundee. You don't know about that, do you, Frieda? You couldn't, because, if you're German, you read mostly about the Watch on the Rhine, I suppose. It's almost the best of all those splendid things—all those English and Scotch Middle Ages poems which I'm crazy about."

Beth began to caper all around the room, watching ecstatically the blue silken figure that followed her, capering as she did, in the mirrors of her dresser, dressing table and cheval glass.

"I'm one of the bluebirds, and I feel like flying!" she panted, obeying an inviting gesture from Frieda to sit before the dressing table and have her hair made tight for the exercise to come. "Frieda, isn't it the very best thing in all the world to be a little girl and jump and fly around? It's like 'We are Seven'—I had that to say in school—'A little child, that feels its life in every limb.' Isn't it the best thing, just glorious?"

"It is, Miss Beth, when you're like that. Some isn't," said Frieda, stooping as if to pick up something.

Beth thought her voice had an odd sound ; she squirmed around in her chair and caught the glimmer of the tears which she had suspected were in Frieda's eyes.

In an instant warm-hearted Beth was on her feet and had her arms around her pretty young maid. " Frieda, dear, what is it ? " she murmured in the voice that few had ever resisted in her short life. " What makes you feel bad ? You have to tell me, because you *have* to, and I want to know ! Please, Frieda ! "

" It's nothing to bother you with, Miss Beth. I didn't mean to cry ever so little. It's my little sister. When I think of her it hurts, and gymnasium and dancing days I have to think of her," said Frieda, with a sudden sob at the end of her sentence.

" What is it, Frieda ? Is she one of those you just spoke of who isn't like that ? " coaxed Beth, so sympathetic that she adopted Frieda's grammar.

Frieda nodded. " She's only nine years old, but she's that lame she can't walk only on crutches, and on them but a little way," said Frieda.

" How awful ! What's her name, poor, poor Frieda ? Can't any one make her well ? " cried Beth, her own eyes overflowing.

" Her name is Lotta, Miss Beth ; we mostly call her Liebchen. It might be a great surgeon could cure her : the doctors told us it might be, but —— Well, Miss Beth, you know great surgeons come high, and there's many more children besides little Liebchen," said Frieda.

" Tell Aunt Alida and my uncle ! " cried Beth, her

face lighting up with the conviction that nothing more would be necessary. Then, as Frieda shook her head, Beth cried: "Don't you know they'd want to know it, Frieda, and help?"

"I know people don't want to be bothered with their servants' troubles, Miss Beth. I wouldn't take the liberty. My mother told me never to let the people I worked for see me look sad. She was at service, too, in her young days, in Germany. She knows; she worked for hochwohlgeboren dāmen," said Frieda proudly.

"For what?" cried Beth.

"Hochwohlgeboren—high-well-born ladies. That's what you call them in Germany," explained Frieda.

In spite of her sympathy Beth's laughter rang out.

"To their faces?" she gasped. "Oh, Frieda, isn't that funny! When all we say is just 'noble ladies'! Well, but your mother didn't know kind, dear, sweet Aunt Alida. And Uncle Jim! Look at all the things they've given me—and you to put them on for me! Of course they'll have Liebchen cured! I shall tell them about her myself."

"Miss Beth, you mustn't, really!" cried Frieda alarmed. "They might be angry with me for talking to you; they might think I told you about my sister to get you to ask them to help her, and as sure as I stand here I never thought of it! Please don't tell them, Miss Beth dear. You don't understand how life is here, yet. It might cost me my place to have told you about my family and got you interested. I can't always

get such a good place as this, Miss Beth—and I'd hate to leave you, if you'll let me say that much."

"I'd hate to have you, Frieda!" cried Beth giving her maid a warm little impetuous hug. "I think you're the nicest girl! And you're young and pretty. I like Anna Mary, of course, but I really don't know what I'd do if I had to have such a solemn, rather frightening person to wait on me. Don't you worry one bit, Frieda. You'll see! The gym club is the Tanagers and Bluebirds. That's what the girls are called. And I'm one of the bluebirds. Don't you know the bluebird stands for happiness? Well, then! I'm going to be a real bluebird. But it will be Uncle Jim and Aunt Alida who will be more really bluebirds than I can be, because they can have Liebchen cured. I just know it will all turn out like a story. My! Aunt Rebecca isn't one bit right! She is sort of afraid of money, but it's like having a big, bottomless fairy chest that you can dip into and bring up most anything, for anybody! Does Liebchen speak English, or is she too young to have learned it?"

"She was born in America, Miss Beth. I was only six years old when I came here," replied Frieda.

Beth was half-way to the door, suddenly realizing that she might be late in the gymnasium. She paused to say:

"Isn't that strange, Frieda? It must mix up families dreadfully to come to America. Queer to be German and have an American sister! You see if you don't have a well-and-strong American sister! I'm sure

the bluebird name is going to work." With which this particular little bluebird flew out of the room, her short, full silken skirt fanned out by the opening of the door until it took only a slight effort of imagination to see her wings.

At the door of the gymnasium Beth paused. The hum of voices, the pounding of heavy weights, the muffled pad of feet told her that while she had been getting ready and talking to Frieda the girls, of whom she was considerably afraid, had arrived. Summoning her courage she opened the door gently and slipped in through the smallest opening that allowed her to do so.

The scene before her was so pretty that Beth forgot all about the timid Bluebird hovering on its threshold. Sixteen girls in various shades and designs of warm red and brilliant blue costumes were running, fencing, tumbling, perching on horizontal bars, swinging dumbbells, stretching their flexible young muscles in all sorts of ways to get them into order for the real business of the day. Among them, in a sense, but quite apart, stood Dirk in black, his black silk jersey ornamented with a monogram combining the blues and red of the club colors. Dirk's expression was disdainful, yet Beth saw at a glance that he was enjoying his boyish sense of superiority over inferior girls. He was the first to espy Beth and beckoned to her frantically to hurry on. A tall young man, splendidly vigorous and strong, with a friendly, jolly face Beth guessed was Mr. Leonard, the instructor. She felt immediately that he was full of a big-boyishness which justified Dirk in saying that it

was suitable to call him "Bob" Leonard. Dirk came over to escort Beth into the room ; he meant to carry out his promise and see her through.

Natalie swung down from a bar on which she had been perched, like a great tanager in her vivid scarlet gymnasium suit. Natalie was perpetually taking away her little cousin's breath by her tropical beauty, seen in a new setting. Beth looked at her now quite overawed, and Natalie laughed, pleased by the adoration she saw in those honest blue-gray eyes.

"Come along, Cozbeth ! Isn't that a nice name ? Not Elizabeth, but Cousin Elizabeth, then just little Cozbeth ! Come along, Bethie dear, and get acquainted with the girls and everything," Natalie said, joining Dirk and Beth. She led the way across the floor to Mr. Leonard.

"Mr. Leonard, this is a new bluebird we've captured. My cousin, Beth Bristead, from Massachusetts. Beth, this is Mr. Leonard who teaches us more than we are clever enough to learn," said Natalie.

Beth smiled back with her ready friendliness to the friendly smile Mr. Leonard bent upon her. But she found time to notice how grown up Natalie's little speech sounded and to think that Natalie had inherited from Aunt Alida her pretty tact, as well as her dark eyes.

"Now, face the music, Cozbeth !" whispered Natalie, wheeling Beth around toward the girls. "Tanagers and Bluebirds, here's the new Bluebird. Some of you know her already. I'm not going to introduce you all

separately. This is my cousin, Beth Bristead, and she's our duck, as well as our Yankee bluebird."

Beth's face was crimson, but she smiled bravely, trying to conquer her shyness.

"We'll begin now that your cousin has come, Miss Natalie," said Mr. Leonard.

"Oh, were you all waiting for me? Isn't that dreadful!" cried Beth. "But, Natalie, I had to talk to Frieda. Her little sister's lame and I want to tell Aunt Alida ——"

"Mama isn't here, Beth dear. We have to do our 'gymsticks' now. That's what Dirk called gymnastics when he was a little tot," said Natalie, disengaging herself, now that she had done her duty by Beth, and going to join the older girls, her special chums.

"I'm going to start Beth in, Mr. Leonard; you can go on with the class," said Dirk.

"That's right. She can begin with the simple exercises, you know, and watch the others. Dirk can start you just as well as I can, little new Bluebird," said Mr. Leonard, moving away with that merry smile of his which won Beth's instant affection.

"Isn't he nice!" she cried fervently. "You don't call him Bob when you speak to him, do you?"

Dirk hastily scanned Beth's face for the rebuke that was farthest from her thoughts. Not seeing it, he shrugged his shoulders and said easily:

"You can't do that, you know, unless you had settled with him to do it. 'Twouldn't go here in class, anyway. But no fellow would tag such a dandy chap as

he is with mister when you talked about him. Nice ! Well, I just guess ! He's the jimmest of all the jim dandies you ever saw ! ”

The class had fallen into line and Mr. Leonard, altering his mind, beckoned Beth and Dirk to join it. He put them through a rapid sword practice, with short sticks instead of more dangerous weapons, right and left, forward thrusts, falling back, advancing, one hand on hip, the other making swift play with the wands.

At first Beth was awkward, half afraid, but in five minutes this had gone from her, and she was almost keeping up with the older, more experienced girls. Her muscles were supple and sound, thanks to her freedom to romp and play in her old Massachusetts country village life. That life was now seeming more and more like a dream as the new life in this great city grew familiar.

Alys was especially good in this practice. There was a cat-like grace about Alys and she moved as quickly, almost as lithely as a cat. She, too, was a “ Bluebird ” but in pale blue. Aunt Alida chose shades for Alys which harmonized with her delicacy of coloring and which emphasized the whiteness of her fair skin.

After this exercise Mr. Leonard took his pupils through trapeze exercises which made Beth gasp with an admiration that held fear of the day when she should be expected to attempt such feats.

Dirk did not allow her long to admire them ; he forced Beth into laying the foundations of her athletic education. He was much surprised to find her his equal in climbing.

"Goodness, that's nothing!" panted Beth when Dirk expressed this surprise. She sat easily on a swinging bar, her arms around its supporting ropes, while she tightened her slipping hair ribbons and readjusted the cap which was secretly her pride and which Dirk could not persuade her to lay aside.

"At Aunt Rebecca's Janie and I climbed everything we could get up. I have been in trees almost half the time in summer; seems as much, anyway. I always could climb, but you ought to see Janie! She isn't as plump as I am; she isn't plump one bit; she's thin. She goes up into anything like a squirrel. We play the loveliest things, Dirk; I know you'd like them. And you'd like Janie. She's my best friend. She's just as nice as she can be. I wish Janie was here in New York, too!"

"Are all the girls nice down there?" asked Dirk. "I'll bet I wouldn't like Janie any better, anyhow!"

"I'm glad you like me, Dirk, because we're cousins and because I like you and I love loving, anyway," said Beth, not evading the compliment. "But Janie is lovely. I suppose all the girls aren't nice anywhere; there are some at home I don't care about. Janie and I think it can't be wrong not to like girls who aren't the kind you are meant to like. Janie has a very nice mother, so she thinks that's the reason I like her. But I haven't any mother at all. Of course Aunt Rebecca has brought me up very carefully. I think she's brought me up more carefully than a mother would. Mothers don't seem to have to be so careful as great-

aunts do; it comes kind of easy to them to bring up their children, sort of mixing petting and punishing. Aunt Rebecca never petted. I used to wish she would, a little, but now I'm glad she didn't because I know she doesn't miss me as a petting person would miss a little girl they'd brought up."

"Do you play with boys down there?" asked Dirk diffidently.

"No," said truthful Beth, "not really. Parties don't count. Of course when you ask girls to a party you have to ask boys too, though I never could see why. Boys are ——" Beth stopped short. The speech she thus checked would not have carried out her resolution to be especially nice to Dirk.

"Boys are no good," Dirk finished for her with some bitterness. "That's what Nat and Alys think and they don't try not to show it, like you. Nat isn't so bad, but Alys! I'd be sorry for boys if they weren't as nice as some girls!"

"They are, Dirk; they truly are!" cried Beth eagerly. "That's just it! It's *some* boys and *some* girls, both ways, nice and not nice! It isn't *all* boys and *all* girls, either way. I think you're ever so nice; I think you're nice as a boy and not just as a cousin. And I'm sure Alys does, too, only sometimes sisters and brothers get into a way of fussing; I've noticed that at home. Don't you tease Alys?" suggested Beth gently.

"Sure thing," admitted Dirk promptly. "But she's the kind you want to. I started in to tease you, but

after you held your tongue that Sunday and got me out of a scrape I didn't want to any more, you can bet your last on that! You're the kind you don't want to tease. Alys is looking for trouble with me so she gets it. I'd hate to bother you, Beth, honest. You don't get mad; you look so surprised and sorry it's no fun."

"You bother me when you bother Alys, Dirk dear," said Beth, seeing her chance.

"Honest? Oh, come off! What do you care?" stammered Dirk.

"I love loving; I just said so," laughed Beth, tactfully trying not to seem to preach. "It's such a fairy-land in this house it worries me if you and Alys aren't just as cozy together as Queen Mab and—and—King Mab! Who was the king of fairy-land?"

"Never heard. Oberon," said Dirk in one breath. "Look here, Beth, if you'll kind of stick up for me I'll do it—stop teasing Alys, I mean. Only I've got to have a chum in this house. And if Alys gets funny I think I might get back one or two at her."

"Oh, I'll be a chum; I'd like to," cried Beth. "Natalie is too big for me and Alys is older than I am, more—less—Alys seems older than she is. I miss Janie; Janie and Tabby, though Poppy is a lovely kitten. That's a bargain, Dirk. And I sha'n't be half so nervous when I know you aren't going to be mean to Alys."

Dirk looked at Beth's round, rosy, placid face and laughed outright.

"Are you nervous, Beth?" he asked.

“When people are rather scrappy around the place it makes you feel as if a thunder-shower was coming up. It’s a nervous thing to expect snappings,” returned Beth, laughing too, as she uncoiled her arms and prepared to descend from the swing.

Dirk followed her and took her down the room to initiate her in the use of dumb-bells. He was much pleased to find that she could not swing one of more than half the weight of his greatest dumb-bell. He looked up to this sweet cousin at such a rate that it restored his manly sense of superiority to find her muscular strength unequal to his own.

The Tanagers and Bluebirds ended with a game of basket-ball, red against blue. Beth had never seen the game, so could not serve her side well this first time. She asked that Dirk might play instead of her and his baseball skill so well fitted him for this game that the Bluebirds won. Beth saw with pleasure that Alys smiled approval on her brother who had helped her side to victory.

“Gymnasium isn’t so bad, is it, Bethie?” asked Natalie, when all the girls transformed by street clothing had gone. The maids attendant on her cousins’ friends had appeared from somewhere below stairs at the end of the afternoon’s exercise to get the pretty maidens out of the tanager and bluebird plumage into the costumes of ordinary mortals. It still oppressed Beth’s simple soul to find all the world served to such a degree.

“It isn’t bad at all; it’s perfectly splendid. And I

wasn't afraid after the first, because nobody noticed me. Dirk and I had quite a nice time. And Mr. Leonard you couldn't be afraid of because there's nothing about him that is one bit frightening," said Beth.

"I'm glad you like him, Bethie; we all do," said Natalie. "You like everything and everybody, Coz-beth. I never saw such a honeypot."

"Well, that's all you know about it, Natalie," declared Beth earnestly. "I dislike lots of things and lots of people. But you don't have anything or any one here I can dislike. Aunt Rebecca says it uses up a lot of valuable strength to dislike. She says it's better to go around the object you dislike, and try not to see it, than it is to go around disliking it. What she means is to dislike anything once for all and drop it. Aunt Rebecca is a lady who never feels half-way, I think. You know what it says in the Bible about lukewarmness? Well, Aunt Rebecca won't ever have that text to think about on the last day."

Natalie's laughter rang out so heartily that it brought Alys running to hear the joke.

"I'd have to repeat the whole speech, and then it wouldn't be the same," sighed Natalie, not trying to explain. "Beth is so much in earnest and is such an old-fashioned little thing! Bethie, I don't believe you were born eleven years ago! You're exactly like a little piece of old flowered silk, or one of those samplers, or a cup of sprigged china that you see in old colonial collections!" cried Natalie with an inspiration.

"Kind of faded and musty?" suggested Beth with a twinkle. "Besides, you don't have to go to colonial collections to see them, Natalie. We have them at home. Aunt Rebecca has my great-great-great-grandmother Bristead's sampler. It has pine trees, baskets of flowers, two kinds of alphabets and the text about serving the Lord in your youth worked on it. She signed it, working, you know: Amelia Elizabeth Barlow. She married great-great-great-grandfather Bristead afterward, of course. And there is almost all of a sprigged china tea set in our house."

Alys stared. "Isn't your great-aunt who brought you up, Beth, quite poor?" she asked.

Natalie frowned and blushed, but Beth was unconscious of offense.

"You mean how could she have these things, Alys?" Beth said. "Aunt Rebecca hasn't much money. I suppose here she would be quite poor, but there she isn't. It doesn't cost much to live there and Aunt Rebecca has all she wants, I guess. She is the biggest giver there to things—like the church and missions and those things, you know. She doesn't ever spend for little things. I like little things, myself! Sometimes I think wicked thoughts, like wondering if a perfectly beautiful dress and hat for me would be nicer than sending to heathens. Now I've had things here lovelier than I ever saw I shall never dare think wicked thoughts again, because when you're bad, and don't get punished for it, it makes you so ashamed you simply have to be good. You see it never could seem

as though we were poor at home because we are Bristeads. Aunt Rebecca says: 'Let the new people have the fine clothes, Beth; we can afford old ones because everybody knows what the Bristeads did for their country before the Revolution and all through it and pretty much ever since.' Of course I'm glad of what Aunt Rebecca calls 'our honorable inheritance,' but I often think good ancestors must like to see you in a becoming dress, that hasn't been turned. But Aunt Rebecca isn't poor, Alys. I don't believe she ever thinks much about money at all; just spends what she can afford and thinks it doesn't matter for her that it's so little."

"That's a long speech, Cozbeth, and it's a very nice one," said Natalie heartily. "I think you've told us about what really means fine ladyhood. But don't think the Cortlandt side cares too much about money, either, Bethie. Mama never measures people by a bank book; neither does father. They've always told us to be glad and thankful we had such a lot entrusted to us, but to remember that it *was* entrusted to us, and that it was a tremendous responsibility to face and that we must never forget that money was only outside; that what we *were* mattered. Mama is very much the same sort of fine lady your aunt is, only one has a great deal to do with and the other only a little, perhaps."

"Goodness, Natalie, don't you suppose I know Aunt Alida?" cried Beth, surprised.

She could not yet see, as Natalie and Alys could, the great importance that wealth gives. "Really and

truly Aunt Alida makes even less fuss about money than Aunt Rebecca. Aunt Rebecca makes a little tiny fuss about *not* making a fuss, and Aunt Alida goes right along, as quiet! I'm glad she and Uncle Jim are the way they are, because I'm as sure as sureness they'll have Liebchen cured!"

"Who in all this world is that?" cried Alys, but Beth shook her head, laughing.

"I'm going to tell them about her first!" she cried, whisking into her room like a blithe bluebird into its nest in the crevice of a tree and closing the door to forbid following and further questioning.

CHAPTER IX

AFOOT AND ON HORSEBACK

ONE of the strangest things in all her strange new life to Beth was the fact that although one lived in the same house with people it might be quite impossible to see them without planning for it. Sometimes her Aunt Alida breakfasted in her room, lunched and dined out and Beth could not see her that day. Mr. Cortlandt's morning hours varied. He was not often away, except when he and his wife were absent together, for he was exceedingly fond of his home and of his lovely wife, but sometimes he breakfasted early, sometimes not at all at home, but at the Country Club where he went to play golf till the snow flew. He was never at home to lunch and if he had a dinner engagement on successive days it happened that Beth might not see him for several days. Even Natalie and Alys were sometimes hard to catch; Dirk was always to be found at certain hours, but during the daytime Natalie and Alys had their youthful engagements which separated them from their cousin for hours. It seemed to Beth hardly possible that a family could live under one roof in such separation, when it was a most affectionate and happy family.

Beth thought of the close intimacy of the simple households she had known "when she was little." She began to think of her life in Massachusetts as something that had happened years ago. A change as great as the one that had befallen Beth acts like years in putting previous ways and days far behind one.

Beth wondered what Aunt Rebecca would say to this feature of the new life. She did not speak of it in the journal-letter which she faithfully wrote each day and which she dispatched to her great-aunt every Monday and Friday in order that Aunt Rebecca should always have a letter on Saturday to reread on Sunday. When Beth gave this bi-weekly letter to Frieda to be included in the household mail she found it hard to realize that Ella Lowndes, or maybe Janie herself, would bring it up to Aunt Rebecca's from the small post-office. How could it be that the old, simple life was still going on while Beth was in fairy-land? Beth was sure that she never could make Aunt Rebecca understand that members of a family might not live in constant touch with one another and yet be happy and fond together. She could see Aunt Rebecca's look of disapproval and hear her say "there must be something wrong about it."

For two days after her first lesson in the gymnasium and her discovery of Frieda's lame little sister Beth could not get a chance to tell Mr. and Mrs. Cortlandt about Liebchen.

The third morning the entire family met at breakfast and while Beth was turning over in her mind the

wisdom of broaching the subject then and was deciding against it, Mr. Cortlandt said :

“ Any engagement for to-day, Miss Bristead ? ”

“ No, Mr. Cortlandt, nothing particular,” returned Beth, laughing back at the laugh in her uncle’s eyes.

“ Will you go with me to be shown something that I hope may interest you ? ” asked Mr. Cortlandt.

Beth saw that her aunt and the three cousins looked merrily excited, that there was some sort of new and delightful secret known to all but herself.

“ I’m pretty sure I’ll be delighted to go, sir,” said Beth. “ When ? ”

“ As soon as breakfast is over and the mail disposed of,” said her Uncle Jim. “ Did you ever see my stable ? ”

“ I didn’t know you had one, here ; I suppose I would have known you must have one in the country. I’d love to see it—if there are horses in it,” said Beth.

“ A stable without horses would be rather worse than a horse without a stable in New York,” said Uncle Jim. “ We’ll visit mine after breakfast.”

“ What kind of a dress do you put on to visit city stables, Aunt Alida ? ” asked Beth seriously when they left the table.

Aunt Alida laughed. “ Frieda has a costume for you that came home last night ; you are to wear that,” she said. “ Don’t be alarmed when you see it about looking conspicuous in the street. We shall go to the stable in the car, though it isn’t far.”

Beth silently went away, returning her aunt’s significant smile with a puzzled but affectionate one.

She found Frieda awaiting her in her room. On the chair before the dressing table lay, of all things, a trig, diminutive riding habit of dark blue, skirt, short coat, knowing little hard hat, gauntlet gloves and all, while across the end of another table lay a silver-mounted riding stock. There was no mistaking the size of these garments, for whom they were intended, yet Beth stopped short and gasped, as she so often did at the succession of wonders she was encountering daily.

“Oh, Frieda! Oh, Frieda, for me?” she cried. Then she had a second thought, a prevention of possible disappointment. “Do they wear riding habits in New York just to visit stables?” she asked.

“No, Miss Beth, I don’t think they do,” replied Frieda, trying not to smile. “I think your uncle wishes you to ride. Miss Natalie, Miss Alys and Master Dirk ride, you know.”

“Indeed I did know it, Frieda!” cried Beth. “If I might ride—but you can’t, if you don’t know how, can you? And I’m sure there isn’t room to learn here.”

“There are riding academies, Miss Beth. You can learn here much better than you can anywhere else, because here’d be first-class teachers,” said Frieda, ready to defend the city that had adopted her. “I think, if you please, Miss Beth, you had better make a little haste. They want to start quite soon.”

“You’ll have to do more even than usual to me, Frieda; I don’t know one bit how to get ready in a riding habit,” said Beth.

Her eyes were flashing with joyous excitement. The thought that this entrancing little habit might foretell her little self on the back of a living horse was almost too much rapture to bear. She could not talk, but silently watched Frieda gather her thick fair hair into a compact braid and loop it at her neck with a broad blue ribbon. Then she silently allowed her maid to divest her of her dainty morning gown and slip over her groomed head the riding skirt that was so entirely the correct sort that her head swam with the joy of it. A tailored little vest preceded the perfect-fitting coat. Beth surveyed herself in the glass, while she absent-mindedly pulled on the gauntlet riding gloves which Frieda offered her.

"I'm so glad I could cry!" said Beth tremulously, tears actually in her shining eyes. "I'm not going to believe I am going to ride for fear I couldn't bear it if I didn't. When Janie and I used to put on grown-up skirts and get up on the apple tree boughs to pretend to ride we never, never could have dreamed one of us could ever look like this! It's exactly like the ladies in the pictures in the Waverley novels! I'm going to remember it's enough to have such a riding habit to visit the stable in, and not mind if I don't ever ride."

This time Frieda allowed herself to laugh at her small lady.

"That would be a queer reason for your aunt to take such pains in having this habit made, Miss Beth. You've no idea the pains she took, stealing your gowns

from me so the tailor shouldn't make a mistake in fitting and yet you know nothing of it," she said.

"I shall never live long enough, nor be good enough, nor—nor anything!—to show Aunt Alida how I love, love, adore her!" cried Beth.

She took her hat, set it on her smooth hair, caught her breath and snatched the hat off again. She made a deep bow to herself in the long glass, saluting with the hat in her hand, in quite a soldierly way.

"Hail, Elizabeth Bristead, my lady!" she said. "You are wonderful, because you used to be nothing in all this world but little Beth! Come, my lady; we're going to ri—to visit the stable!" Whereupon with a grand parting flourish of the hat, she set it once more upon her head and ran out of the room, quite as though she were still "little Beth."

"Oh, doesn't she look fine!" cried Natalie as Beth appeared. The others were assembled, waiting her. "Her face rising up out of that habit looks like a pretty doll's face over the top of a black Christmas stocking."

"Natalie, Natalie!" laughed her mother. "Does this mean a poet or a painter? But you *are* a satisfactory small thing in that habit, Bethie!"

"I ought to be! I wish I could thank you," cried Beth, giving her aunt a hug that emphasized the wish.

"Come now, gushing ladies of assorted sizes, the car's chugging away outside impatiently," Mr. Cortlandt protested.

So they all gathered up their coats and went out. They filled the tonneau of this car, which Mr. Cort-

landt kept for city use, so completely that Alys groaned as she adjusted herself into as small a wedge as she could and remarked that she was glad they were not going far.

They rolled leisurely around two corners and ran along a few blocks on an avenue, then turned into a cross street and, a short distance down its length eastward, stopped.

"Is this—why, yes, it is a stable!" cried Beth. "I had been looking for a regular barn."

"Painted red, with a wooden cock, or a trotting horse on the roof to tell which way the wind blew?" laughed her uncle. "Not here, my niece! Here we go into an opening in a long line of brick, much as the cave men used to go into caves to stable their horses and goats. And we go up-stairs to visit the horses."

Beth jumped out, swung by her uncle's outstretched hands.

"It doesn't matter; I'm sure it will be all right when we get there. Everything here is different, but perfectly splendid," Beth cried, ready to be delighted, which is half the recipe for having a good time anywhere.

The stablemen greeted Mr. Cortlandt with hearty liking shining through their respectful salutations. One of them hailed Dirk with a slap on the shoulder which Dirk returned by a friendly poke. Beth noticed that Dirk seemed quite transformed by this visit. At home the girls led; Dirk was, as he would have put it, "not in it," but here in the stable his sisters suddenly

shrank into nobodies of importance and Dirk became the one of the Cortlandt children who mattered.

"Your horse is all right, Master Dirk," the man who slapped Dirk said. "He may have had a little cold, but I think he was just playin' off. They're foxy when they don't want to go. 'T any rate there's not wan thing wrong wid him now."

"Has Dirk a horse? A horse his very own?" Beth whispered, awestruck, to Alys.

"We all three have," said Alys. "Come on; we're going to see them."

Nothing that had happened so far had so completely overwhelmed Beth as this statement. A horse! each of her young cousins owned a whole horse, a live, entire horse! She followed her aunt and uncle up to the second floor of this curious stable in a maze of wonder.

They turned to the right. There were ten airy box stalls, nearly as big as small bedrooms in the New York flats which Beth had never seen. Eight of these stalls were occupied. Beth did not recognize her uncle's carriage horses, because she had never seen them without their harnesses, but she had no eyes for them, nor for the beautiful, slender Virginian saddle horses which occupied five of the stalls. All she could see was a pony in the eighth stall. He was not tied and he whirled about and trotted up to the stall door when he heard his visitors coming, lifting his head and sniffing the air with his short, somewhat turned-up nose, hopeful of a treat, while his bright eyes peered out under his heavy thatch of forelock. He was the color of

coffee-and-cream, with a long, thick tail and mane, almost brown. He was not a Shetland pony of the smallest type, but a stocky little fellow about four feet high and that is large for a pony, since four inches more than that is the greatest height allowed them by the proper authorities.

"Oh, what a dar-arling!" cried Beth. "Is that yours, Dirk? Will he bite?"

She was at the pony's head as she spoke, half timidly, wholly ecstatically allowing herself to be sniffed for sweets.

"No; that one's mine, that chestnut, and he's the best of the bunch," replied Dirk, going over to his horse's stall, yet keeping his eye on Beth to see the fun.

"Well, maybe, but this pony! Yours, Alys?" persisted Beth.

"I thought, perhaps, you would ride him, Beth," said Mr. Cortlandt quietly.

"Me! I ride him? This angelic dumpling!" cried Beth beginning to tremble.

"Isn't that a new brand of dumpling?" inquired her uncle, as everybody laughed. "Of course you're to do as you choose about riding your own pony. You may ride, or sell, or give him away, but I thought you'd like to ride him. He is your own, to do with as you please."

"Mine? My own! This—this—— Oh, Uncle Jim, Uncle Jim!" And Beth, shaking like a leaf with the excessive, unbearable joy of this discovery, put her head down on the lower and closed half of the

stall door and sobbed outright, while the pony nosed her, unheeded.

Only for a moment did Beth's joy so overwhelm her. Then she sprang up, frantically hugged her amused uncle, crushed her aunt in a tempestuous embrace and spun Alys, who happened to be nearest her, in a wild dance for an instant, much to that dignified young person's horror, for the stablemen were standing by greatly amused.

"My pony, my darling!" Beth cried, whirling over to the stall again. But here caution checked her raptures. "What can I do to him? Will he let me hug him?" she asked.

"I'll take you into his stall, miss," said the man with whom Dirk had seemed to be on such friendly terms. "He's used to me and I'll introjuice you like."

He opened the stall door and Beth followed him within, to be introduced to her own, her very own pony.

"You brought no sugar? Of course not, not knowin' what you was comin' to see! Here's some then. I keep it handy in my coat-tail pockets, not knowin' whin I'll be wantin' it to reward one or another of the horses. They'll do much more for you, miss, if they know you're like to be givin' them a bit of a treat now an' thin."

"Everybody will," returned Beth gravely, to the man's manifest delight.

She offered the pony a lump of sugar, at first with a hand somewhat shaky and too ready to withdraw, but quite steady at the second lump.

"Oh, how beau-tifully mousy-velvet his nose feels!" cried Beth. "How shall I ever go to sleep to-night? And how shall I ever, ever tell Janie and Aunt Rebecca about him?"

"We must start now, Bethie," said Mr. Cortlandt. "Tim will saddle the pony; we must get off."

"Get off? That's exactly what I should do, Uncle Jim!" cried Beth. "You don't mean I am to ride right straight off, to-day? I don't know how to ride."

"But the rest of us do! I shall keep you beside me, between Dirk and me. The pony has been trained for a little girl's use; he knows how to be ridden, if you don't know how to ride him. Saddle him, please, Tim," said Mr. Cortlandt.

"Yes, sir. Sure, all you have to do is to sit like he was a rockin'-chair, keepin' your lines so you do be feelin' his mouth easy, an' your backbone straight, miss," said Tim. "Come now, shake hands wid your new mistress, Trump, an' it'll be out you go! Put your hand down, miss, an' bid him shake hands good-bye an' he'll do it."

"Is his name Trump? I shall never call him anything but my dearie, my darling! Shake hands, Trump, you blessedest thing, you!" Saying which Beth held out her hand, palm uppermost, as Tim had bidden her, and Trump obligingly raised his right forefoot and offered his clean little hoof to be shaken, to the unspeakable rapture of his new owner.

Tim brought forth the most knowing looking, perfect miniature saddle and bridle and put them on

Trump, first brushing his already speckless coat lest a bit of dust should escape his vigilance.

His assistants were saddling and bridling the other horses. If Beth had been wise enough in horse lore she would have known that there were few such beautiful creatures anywhere as the five horses making ready for her relatives' ride. But, small as he was, Trump filled her eye to the exclusion of all else.

The horses were led down the incline which was their stairway while the riders descended the steps. Mrs. Cortlandt discovered that Beth was trembling and rightly construed it as not entirely caused by her joy.

"You're not to be afraid, little Beth," she said, putting her arm around the little girl. "We would not for the world let you go into danger. Trump will trot along with his big comrades as quietly as a kitten. We tried him before we bought him ; Tim's little girl rode him and she does not know how to ride. It is the easiest thing in the world to sit on that broad, steady back of his and he will never play you a trick."

"I seem to be too—too much little Beth Bristead, still, to ride in New York," said Beth faintly.

"Bless your heart, dear, pretend you're Miss Elizabeth Bristead, then !" laughed Aunt Alida. "I think when you're mounted confidence will come. Besides, we are going over country roads just as soon as we can reach them."

Aunt Alida's prophecy came true. When Beth was mounted on her entrancing gift, with her lines in her gauntleted hand, her stock held at precisely the correct

angle, as she was bidden to hold it, and especially when she found how easily Uncle Jim could reach down from his splendid chestnut Virginian and touch Trump's bridle, and when she heard that rhythmic tread of horses' feet and knew that her own, her *own* pony's feet made part of it, horsemanship flowed into her like an inspiration. To her uncle's satisfaction and Dirk's undisguised pride she held herself bravely erect, her cheeks reddened with excitement, her eyes were almost black, her lips parted with her rapid breathing and she laughed aloud as, having gained a quiet avenue, the horses began to trot and plucky little Trump kept up with them, in spite of his difference in length of legs.

It was a wonderful ride, that first one! Though it was but the first of many to come, each a rapture, none other ever could be that first one of all, with Trump newly owned. Oh, to watch those quick little ears, that tossing, ambitious little head and to know they were *her* pony's ears, it was *her* pony's head! To feel the strong, warm body bearing her along and to know that as long as life was in it that was to be its duty! To pull off her glove and pat the sturdy neck, the thick mane, and to know the whole wonderful little fellow was her Trump, her own, Beth Bristead's! Suddenly Beth lost her fear of moving in her saddle and bent forward to lay her face on the mat of mane.

"Oh, Trump, my darling, my darlingest! How I love you! And you are mine to have and to hold, for better or for worse, till death doth us part! And you

won't die, my preciousest, because I'll love you so you can't!" she whispered close to the ear that she believed moved in response to her words and not because her breath tickled it.

They rode out into the country, the pretty, hilly country that lies north of New York. It was a warm day. Winter had not set in, although it was early December. The fields were brown, but the air was soft, and though there were no birds, except the winter ones, the sunshine was so warm that one felt as though a robin or a bluebird might sing from any orchard that the horses trotted past.

"We are to lunch at a good place not far beyond here, Beth, and if you are tired I'll telephone back to have Tim come out in the car and take Trump home for you," Beth's uncle said, after a long silence between them.

"I'm not tired, Uncle Jim. I'm too happy to speak; that's all," said Beth. "At first I was boiling over, but now I've boiled down quiet and it's all the stronger. It's exactly like preserves—or soup."

Mr. Cortlandt threw back his head to laugh as boyishly as Dirk, who shouted at this speech.

Reluctantly Beth allowed Trump to be taken from her by a groom when they had arrived at their destination for lunch. It seemed impossible that any one they did not know could be trusted to feed and properly care for a pony so small and so precious as Trump.

After a lunch that included all the things that young palates like best and for which the riders were hungry

enough to have enjoyed it if it had been of the plainest sort, Beth and her uncle sat down in one vast lounging chair in a glass-enclosed corner of the hotel piazza to rest and chat while one of them smoked.

"I'd like to tell you about Frieda now, Uncle Jim, if you feel like listening," began Beth, reaching up a hand to caress the collar of her uncle's coat.

Mr. Cortlandt took the wandering hand prisoner in one of his and stroked the fingers. "Who is Frieda, Bethie?" he asked.

"My maid," said Beth, not yet lost to the strangeness of this statement. "I've been wanting for days to tell you about her."

"Better have your aunt hear it, if it's about your maid," said Mr. Cortlandt.

"It isn't exactly; it's Liebchen," said Beth.

"Better call your aunt over anyway, for you seem to be wandering in your mind, Bethie," laughed Mr. Cortlandt, and he beckoned his wife to a chair beside his.

She came over from where she was sitting and took it.

"Beth has something to tell us about Frieda and Liebchen; I hope you may know what she means, Alida," Mr. Cortlandt said.

"Frieda did not mean to tell me, Aunt Alida," Beth hastily made sure of this explanation. "I was talking to her while she was dressing me the other day and it all came out without her knowing it would. She felt afraid it was wrong, or that some one would think it was."

"But you know, Beth, that I am not an ogre," suggested Aunt Alida. "So tell me about it."

"Frieda has a little sister nine years old. Her name is Lotta, but they call her Liebchen. I think that is nice. I wonder if I could call Trump Liebchen sometimes! She is an American, because she was born here, but she is German Frieda's full sister. She is a dreadful cripple; she can only walk a few steps with crutches and she can't walk at all without them. When I asked Frieda if she couldn't be cured she said it would cost a great deal, if it could be done. I—I — It seems so sad, doesn't it, to know that a little girl, only nine years old, and so sweet they call her Liebchen, is a dreadful cripple?" Beth ended her story lamely; she could not bring herself to suggest to her uncle that he might have Liebchen operated upon when she came face to face with that issue.

"And you thought that we would see what could be done for the child, if we knew about it?" asked Mrs. Cortlandt.

"You could do less for me, Aunt Alida!" cried Beth eagerly. "You are so good to me, but I don't need another earthly thing! Wouldn't it be fine if Liebchen could be cured?"

"Have you seen her, Beth?" asked Mr. Cortlandt.

"No, but I can imagine her, all pale and peaked, just lying there, and poor, and only nine!" cried Beth eagerly.

"An operation is exceedingly expensive, Beth," said Mr. Cortlandt solemnly. "It would require a skilful

surgeon, of course, and a thousand dollars would hardly cover the cost, probably."

"A thousand dollars! Oh, Uncle Jim! Isn't that fearful! But if I could do something—couldn't I sell something, or——" She stopped, unable to suggest anything practical.

"There is Trump," said Mr. Cortlandt thoughtfully, watching Beth's face. He saw her turn red, then white and heard her catch her breath. "I have just bought that pony. I know he would sell easily—would you care to give up Trump to help that child, Beth?"

Beth turned her face to hide it in her uncle's shoulder. She breathed hard and fast. He heard her whisper: "'The sacrifice of a broken heart Thou wilt not despise.' And it will break it. Uncle Jim," she said sitting up, a poor, white, strained looking Beth, "I will try, I will try to—to give up Trump."

"You're the trump, my Bethikins!" cried Mr. Cortlandt just as Aunt Alida exclaimed:

"James Cortlandt, you shall not torture my little Beth!"

"No, you won't give up your Trump; he is yours for keeps! And, yes, I will see what can be done for this little Liebchen, American sister of your German maid! If she can be cured, cured she shall be! I've three healthy youngsters of my own and a plump, sound little niece, any of whom might have been crippled. And I've been entrusted with so much money, Bethie, that even if it cost two thousand dollars to cure that child it would not entail sacrifice on any

of us to pay the bill. As time goes on I shall want you to learn what all this power means, Beth, my dear, and to help my girls and boy to use it wisely, unselfishly. I think you are going to be exceedingly helpful in that way, with your warm little heart and your sensible little head! We'll look into Liebchen's case at once, Bethie, and I'm much obliged to you for ferreting it out for Aunt Alida and me—aren't we, Alida?"

"Of course we are, Jimmy dear!" cried Aunt Alida. "And it will count for Beth that she would have given up her dear pony, if she had to, rather than let Liebchen remain a cripple. So she will have a part in two ways in the cure, if it ever is a cure."

"Oh, what dear, dear uncles and aunts you are!" cried Beth, her eyes wet with happy tears. "And why do people say that money is bad? It is perfectly beautiful to go about doing things!"

"Poor and rich, it is all one, Bethie darling," murmured Aunt Alida, her lips touching the little girl's hair as she leaned forward in her chair to answer Beth. "It is the heart that makes poverty into riches, or, when it is a hard heart, turns riches into the most ghastly poverty."

Beth rode home that afternoon blissfully, but seriously happy. Trump was hers, the sacrifice was not required of her, and at every beat of his small hoofs she loved him better. Yet she was thinking long thoughts, for a child of eleven, and she saw the road of her coming years stretching out before her, as the road she was riding stretched, growing denser, fuller

with every pace, but full of beautiful and glorious possibilities. It led her into the world of grownupdom, where there were to be great tasks to fulfil, great good to be done. And little Beth, true to her great-aunt Rebecca's old-fashioned, good training, prayed in her heart that when the time came she might not fail.

CHAPTER X

THE HOSPITAL ON THE HEIGHTS

CHRISTMAS has a way of jumping out at the world as if it had crouched down low behind Thanksgiving Day and hidden. Then, suddenly, out it pops crying: "Ah, ha! You didn't know I was so near, did you?" Whereupon everybody gets quite flustered and is set rushing and hurrying upon shopping and working to make up for being caught unawares.

Christmas played this favorite trick upon the Cortlandt family this year. He popped out upon Mrs. Cortlandt one morning at breakfast in the sunny, rosy breakfast room which had so entranced Beth on the night of her arrival.

"Mercy, Jim!" Mrs. Cortlandt cried as her husband opened his newspaper. "I suppose I knew in a vague way that this was the tenth day of December, but I haven't taken in the fact in connection with Christmas! Children, we must make out our lists to-day; there are but two little weeks left! How has it happened?"

"I've made mine," said Natalie, "and Alys has nearly finished hers. We found out last night that it was dreadfully late."

"Bethie, you never did real Christmas shopping, did

you?" Mrs. Cortlandt said. "It's fun, no matter what the papers and magazines say about it—though of course one does go to bed each night of the final days feeling that she can't possibly resume shopping in the morning! But one always can! Have you made out your list of friends you will remember?"

Beth shook her head. "No, Aunt Alida," she said. "There's the beautiful miniature of me you've had made for Aunt Rebecca. I thought maybe I'd make Aunt Rebecca a pincushion for her spare room; it's shabby—I mean the one she has now is—and I'd like to make something for Janie and four other girls, only I don't know what to make." Beth's brow wrinkled; her eyes looked troubled. She, for one, had fully realized that ten days of December had fled and that she did not know how to prepare for Christmas in her new surroundings. What, for instance, could she make for this, her recently discovered family? They all had more than she could possibly have imagined. Beth's fingers were not skilful at fancy work, but buying gifts, and gifts for people so endowed—she would never be rich enough to do this, even if she could think of anything to buy.

"Are you old-fashioned about Christmas, too, Bethie? Do you feel that you must put part of your own strength and time into your gifts, not buy them?" asked Aunt Alida. "I have a suspicion that Janie and the four others would rather have a pretty bit of jewelry to wear than anything you could make. Girls all love rings and bangles and chains and dangles."

Uncle Jim had been listening behind the outspread page of his morning *Sun*. Uncle Jim had a habit of hearing when one thought him otherwise occupied, and of being interested in problems that one would not have expected a grown man to understand. That was the main reason why Uncle Jim was so lovable.

Now he emerged from his paper and looked around its edge at Aunt Alida.

"I believe I forgot to say that Beth has a Christmas account to draw upon," he said carelessly, as if Beth were not within hearing. "Santa Claus deposited a hundred dollars in my hands for her. She will find it in your care, Alida; I might not be near by when she wanted to draw upon it. Santa said he did not approve of our buying gifts to be given in Beth's name; he said he wanted her to do her own deciding and buying, so he handed over to me for her use the sum I mention. I forgot to speak of this before."

"Oh, Uncle Jim!" cried Beth, as she always did at each new instance of her uncle's generous thought of her.

Words failed her, but the thrill in her voice, the quick flush and dilated eyes took their place. There is no telling what Beth might have done as the magnitude of her personal wealth sank into her consciousness. A hundred dollars! That would be almost enough to paint the old house at home, Beth thought; they had been wishing to have it painted.

Just then Riggs emerged from behind the swinging door and offered Beth the muffins with his unbending

gravity. It prevented any outburst of gratitude to her uncle on Beth's part, for Riggs' solemn dignity froze Beth's blood.

Mr. Cortlandt was satisfied with the look in Beth's eyes as she mutely thanked him. More and more he saw his little sister, Beth's mother, whose life had been so short, in the sweet face of the child she had not lived to kiss a second time, and more and more he delighted in giving Beth pleasure, as if he were reaching backward over the years to make that lost Nannie happy. He nodded at Beth with entire understanding and affection.

"Don't forget that you are due at the hospital to-day," he reminded her. "Santa Claus mustn't crowd out your crippled Liebchen, you know."

"I am going to take Beth there at half-past ten," said Aunt Alida. "Send these letters to my room, Riggs, and have these destroyed." She indicated the two piles into which she had divided her morning mail as she spoke. "Beth, dear, tell Frieda that after she has made you ready she may make herself ready to go to the hospital. I will take her with us on this first visit to her little sister."

"She'll be glad, Aunt Alida—I hope she will be glad after she gets there!" added Beth. "They are going to tell us whether Liebchen can be cured, aren't they?"

"Yes. They operated yesterday afternoon. I am sure I hope the poor child may walk again," said Aunt Alida, rising from breakfast. "Natalie, Alys, Dirk, I want a good report from the schoolroom to-day. Beth

is playing at education this winter, as she is playing at being a visitor to Wonderland, but it must be real work for you, my dears."

"Yes, mother," said Alys dutifully. Alys was the one who was most inclined to slip as easily as possible through lessons. But there was a quality in this marvelous Aunt Alida's gentleness that made her children obey her when she issued one of her rare commands.

Beth ran up to her room, not waiting for the elevator and the others. She opened the door of her room; its delicate beauty seemed to come forward to meet her, as if she saw it for the first time. There was a bunch of violets and ferns on a small teakwood table; their sweetness filled the air, spring seemed to be flooding in at the windows through the delicate net, past the folds of the blue velour curtains, on the brilliant light of the cloudless sunshine of a New York early winter morning.

"Oh, Frieda, what a lovely, lovely young room this is, all white and blue!" cried Beth. "Where did the violets come from?"

"Miss Alys left them. She said you'd know why," said Frieda.

Beth flushed with pleasure; she did know why. Alys had been a little bit cross the night before and she and Beth came near having a small quarrel. These violets were to say Alys was sorry.

"She's dear, too!" cried Beth, in high satisfaction, meaning that Natalie and Dirk were not her only lovable cousins, though so far she had to try not to like them a great deal better than Alys.

"Aunt Alida said that you were to go with us to the hospital, Frieda. You are to get ready after you have helped me dress. But I will dress myself, so you can get ready now," said Beth indistinctly, her face buried in the violets.

"Mrs. Cortlandt is too kind!" cried Frieda tremulously. "I was wondering how I ever could wait till you got home to hear about Liebchen."

"Especially as we may not come straight home," added Beth. "Aunt Alida is going to get ready for Christmas as fast as she can; she didn't know how near it was till she happened to see the newspaper date this morning. If you will do my hair, Frieda, I can go on dressing alone. I do wonder what Aunt Rebecca would have said if I had had to have help getting dressed at home!" Frieda threw Beth's dressing scarf over her shoulders as the little girl seated herself before the dressing table. Beth adjusted the pale blue ribbons that tied the neck and sleeves with the satisfaction this dainty garment always inspired.

Frieda shook out the fly-away masses of Beth's pretty hair with much the same satisfaction that Beth felt in the filmy scarf. Beth's hair was growing beautiful under her maid's skilful treatment and Frieda liked nothing so much as adorning Beth. She had lost her heart to her little lady at their first meeting and, since Beth had tried to help Liebchen, Frieda's love for her was with difficulty kept within the bounds of a maid's relation to her charge—not that Beth would have minded if it overstepped those bounds!

"When I was in Germany, Miss Beth, the young countess I served had hair much like your own, but I truly believe by spring yours will be handsomer than hers was," said Frieda, holding the golden strands toward the light.

"A countess! Frieda, honest?" cried Beth deeply impressed. "I thought you were only a little girl when you left Germany."

"I went back to an aunt to be taught a lady's maid's work, Miss Beth," said Frieda. "And my aunt got me into the service of the Herr Graf von Witzleben, to attend the young Grafin Elise. I was glad to come back to New York, Miss Beth. But she had beautiful hair, Grafin Elise. I mean to make yours handsomer."

Beth sighed, a long breath of emotion. "I've read about earls and countesses all my life and I've seen pictures of them going around with coronets and long velvet gowns, in ballads and English history, but I never, never in all this world expected to have some one do my hair and brush it till it was better than the beautiful hair of a real, live countess, whose hair she had brushed before mine! Frieda, there isn't a single thing, not one single thing, I honestly believe, that is in a story-book that doesn't come out of it and get into my true story this winter! Nor in fairy stories, either. When I go back home again I'm pretty near sure I won't know whether I was a real girl this winter, or one I read about."

For once Frieda permitted herself to laugh outright.

"There couldn't be a story too good for you, Miss

Beth dear," she said. "And as to noble ladies in Europe they're not so much different. A fine lady is a fine lady; if you call her just 'Miss' and she's an American, or if you call her 'my lady' and she's something else. She's only a lady all the same and it makes nothing out what you call her. Mrs. Cortlandt is a far grander lady to my thinking than the cross mother of my little Lady Elise over there, not to speak of how handsome the one is and how awful plain the other was. It's likely there'll be some nobility from Europe dining with your aunt this winter; they're often over, and you'll see lords and ladies are just like Mister and Missuses."

"Then I'd rather not see them," said Beth decidedly. "I should not want to stop thinking a noble earl was above a man. Only I do think Uncle Jim could be a king and not be one bit more splendid than he is as his regular self."

Beth, her hair in perfect order, insisted upon being allowed to finish her toilette unaided while Frieda made herself ready for their expedition. The result was that young mistress and maid were ready at the same time. Beth ran down to her aunt's room to report herself dressed and Frieda repaired to the maids' sitting-room to wait till she should be called.

Beth found Anna Mary folding a soft pink wrapper and packing it into a suit-case in which already lay lace-trimmed white garments and some attractive looking books. Anna Mary's face expressed grim disapproval, but in reality she had eagerly sorted out these gifts for

Liebchen and she felt pleasure in making them ready to go to her.

Aunt Alida gathered up her splendid furs, nestling her chin into their cloudy softness as she smiled over them at Beth.

"I have had Anna Mary get together some outgrown garments which belonged to Alys," she said. "They should be nearly the right size for Frieda's little sister. And the girls selected a few of their fairy tales and a story they thought Liebchen would enjoy. Mrs. Hodgman is having a basket of fruit and jellies made ready. Shall we go now, Beth dear?"

"I'm ready, Aunt Alida, and Frieda came down when I did. How lovely it is, Aunt Alida, to look the way you do in those furs and yet be as good as you are beautiful, taking things to the hospital!" cried Beth sincerely.

Anna Mary looked up with a smile and Mrs. Cortlandt actually blushed.

"You funny little Beth," she cried. "Do you think it proves goodness to like to give pleasure to a sick child? A Hottentot would want to."

"You're not very Hottentotish," remarked Beth, following her aunt out of the room, while Anna Mary brought up the rear with the suit-case.

In the hall below they found Mrs. Hodgman waiting with a maid in charge of a basket that in itself was as refreshing as an orchard; green and white it was, made of shining braided straw, with a big tonic red bow triumphing on its handle.

"The car is at the door, Mrs. Cortlandt," said Mrs. Hodgman. "Kitty, you may set the basket in the car and then call Frieda. I have grapes and oranges, Mrs. Cortlandt, and several glasses of jellies and preserves, lemons, in case the child is feverish, figs—I can't recall precisely all that was put into the basket. Here are the flowers you ordered for Miss Beth to take."

"I am sure the basket holds all that it possibly can of the wisest selection, Mrs. Hodgman," said Aunt Alida, with the smile that made every one who served her feel rewarded. "Here is Frieda. Good-morning, Frieda. Don't look so anxious, child; I am sure we are to hear the best of tidings. Come, my Bethie."

They repaired to the car, the chauffeur held the door open and arranged the robes, while Anna Mary gave a touch to Mrs. Cortlandt's furs that was not needed and which showed that austere person concealed affection for her mistress under her severity. With less noise and fuss than a car that held itself less proudly would have made, they got under way and glided smoothly over the asphalt, up the avenue.

"Take the park to a Hundred and Tenth Street, Léon," Mrs. Cortlandt ordered the chauffeur, catching the gleam in Beth's eyes as she looked over the bordering wall of the park at the trees and the sunny malls with the prettiest children in the world romping down them.

Léon Charette obediently turned in at the entrance gate and they slowly made their way northward, one of

a procession of cars and carriages going in the same direction, though not in such numbers as would be out later in that glorious day.

Beth could hardly sit still; the splendors of human beings, big and little, of cars, above all the perfect horses and the beauty of the park had not grown familiar to her. Central Park was like an enchanted forest of her wonder tales; it gathered up romance, poetry, the Field of the Cloth of Gold and fairy revels, and made them visible to her; made her even a part of them.

"I never, never can make Janie understand how it looks," Beth sighed, out of a long silence.

"You must have your Janie here for a visit another winter," laughed Aunt Alida.

Beth thanked her with a look, but did not reply. She pondered this suggestion for a long time. "Another winter!" Did Aunt Alida expect her to spend another winter in this new world? What would Aunt Rebecca say to that? And poor Aunt Rebecca, alone in the old house! Was Beth a heartless child to let her pulses leap and her breath come quick at the thought of coming back to this enchanted life?

"I'm pretty sure I should be homesick after I had time; you do like things you have first, even if they aren't very likable," Beth said, unexpectedly to herself, aloud.

Aunt Alida laughed again; she seemed to guess Beth's train of thought.

"And some of us manage to like things because we

ought to, but not many of us, and it is not a genuine singing-in-the-heart liking when we do!" she said.

"No, it isn't," agreed Beth gravely. "It keeps quiet. I guess it takes all its breath to be a liking at all, so it can't sing."

The car turned out of the park, westward, at the uppermost gate. It came into a broad street through which one caught a glimpse of heights that Beth had not seen before, crowned by a great cathedral and a building which Aunt Alida pointed out.

"There is the hospital, Beth," she said. "That is our destination."

"It looks kind and not in the least sorry," said Beth.

At the hospital Mrs. Cortlandt led the way into the entrance hall. Léon carried in the basket, Frieda took the suit-case. An attendant came forward and, when Mrs. Cortlandt explained her errand, ushered them into a waiting-room and disappeared. In a short time they were bidden to follow a pleasant-faced young woman, in a uniform and cap, to see Liebchen.

"She is in a remarkably satisfactory condition," smiled the nurse, looking at Frieda, divining that she was chiefly concerned in this report. "It is too soon to tell how much has been accomplished by the operation, but the child is doing remarkably well."

Frieda caught Beth's hand without knowing that she did so, and Beth returned its pressure. When big things arrive, little things, like differences in station, disappear like wax in heat.

Mr. Cortlandt had taken a room for Liebchen. When

the door opened Beth saw at once that it was a pleasant room, sunny and attractive, though plain and white. On the bed lay a child, pale and thin, but with eyes alight as she watched for the opening of the door. She was a decidedly pretty child, but there was something so sweet in her face that one thought more of its loveliness than of its prettiness.

"Oh, meine Frieda!" cried Liebchen holding out her hands; her arms she could not move.

"Liebchen!" cried Frieda, and kissed the little creature with all her heart. "And here is Mrs. Cortlandt who is doing it all for you, kleine Liebchen. And Miss Beth," added Frieda.

Liebchen smiled shyly, but with eyes warm with love. "I should say thank you, only it gives no big enough way to say it," Liebchen said softly.

"Frieda, help Beth open our budgets, please," cried Aunt Alida, nodding at the child and rightly guessing that their baskets would further acquaintance.

Beth had the covering Japanese napkins off the basket in a twinkling. In no time at all Liebchen's room looked like a creditable pantry; fruit and glasses of good things adorned the dresser and table and window sill, while Liebchen's nurse looked on with her face quite shut up with smiles.

"I do so like to take care of a child whose case allows dainties!" she cried.

Liebchen was overcome when the contents of the suit-case, the fine night-gowns, the lacy skirts, the soft

wrapper, like a great rose, overflowed on bed and chairs.

"Oh, my, oh, my, oh, my!" cried Liebchen. "It won't be enough for me to walk; I'll have to dance when I'm up once!"

"You may dance, little Liebchen; if you can walk you can dance!" cried Mrs. Cortlandt. "Frieda, you are to stay with Liebchen until the nurse says you must go. Miss Beth will not be at home for some hours, so you are welcome to stay. I am going to ask that my little niece be shown the wards, hastily, for we have scant time, but she has never seen a hospital. Do you think we may go through a ward or two?" she added to the nurse.

"Surely. I will ring for an attendant," said the nurse, carrying out her intention.

Beth went over and bent down to Liebchen. "You're a dear and I know you will run like the other kind of a deer soon. And I'm so glad, you don't know!"

Liebchen put a hand on each of Beth's cheeks to draw her face closer and kiss it. "I love you, love you!" she whispered. "Frieda told me I should, but you are a million times prettier and nicer than I thought you were. If I get able to walk do you s'pose you'd let me come and button you up the back some day, 'stead of Frieda?"

Beth laughed. "We'll do something better than that!" she cried, not knowing what it would be, but full of undefined intentions for Liebchen's future gladness. "Good-bye, Liebchen! It's such a nice name,

only you can't say dear, or anything with it, because it's that itself! Maybe I can come again, but anyway you will come to see me and that's better."

She waved her hand back as she stood in the doorway. Of all the happiness she had tasted in her life Beth had never had a sip of anything so sweet as the thought that she had brought about Liebchen's chance to get well. And, besides, it was delightful to feel that Liebchen was such a *little* girl regarded from the summit of Beth's additional two years!

Under the guidance of a hospital attendant Beth followed her aunt into one of the great public wards of the hospital. It was not visiting day nor hour, but Mrs. James Cortlandt was a privileged person, as Beth discovered. She did not know then, but later on learned that her uncle was a large contributor to this hospital and that her beautiful aunt's father had been one of its founders.

The ward was wide and long, marvelously clean, with its white plaster walls and row upon row of narrow white iron beds. But Beth walked silently down its length, and, after a few steps, slipped her hand into Aunt Alida's. The patients on the beds looked comfortable, but there were so many of them and most of the faces were worn, as if the pain that brought them hither was only a small part of suffering patiently borne. One or two of the beds had screens around them. Beth wondered why, for she saw that Aunt Alida tried to withdraw her attention from them. She guessed that within the screens were worse cases than

those allowed to lie in the sunshine of the undivided ward.

At last the visit was over. Beth drew a breath of relief as they came down into the entrance hall. In the car she snuggled close to Aunt Alida and slipped a hand into her roomy muff.

"Didn't you like to see the hospital, Bethie?" asked Aunt Alida.

"It is sad, don't you think so?" said Beth. "Liebchen was all happy; so was her room. But so many, so dreadfully many, all sick at once! And lots more we didn't see! All in rows, sort of like ears of corn. It seems awful to be sick in a row like that!"

"That isn't the way to look at it, Bethie," said Mrs. Cortlandt, succeeding in stifling a laugh. "If these people had not a bed in a hospital row, where do you suppose they would be ill? Many of them in homes far more crowded than a row, without order or cleanliness, without any one who understood nursing, without the implements of nursing. Some of them would not have any home to be sick in, not even the crowded tenement room. The hospital is not a sad place; it is a cheerful place. Since there is sickness and suffering, the one comfort is that the hospital gives the poor a chance to get well again. The ward is bright and sunny. I'm always thankful there are hospitals when I visit one. Try to see the glad side of things, not the sad side, my Beth!"

"Yes, Aunt Alida, I do. Only that made me think of that psalm I learned by heart last: 'A thousand

shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand.' I felt as if all those little beds were pavements and I was walking on people fallen on them, 'at my side and at my right hand,' don't you know? And it does smell perfectly awfully strong of carbolic!" Beth ended with a shudder.

"Don't you like carbolic, Beth? I don't mind it; it is so clean!" laughed Mrs. Cortlandt. "Say to yourself: 'I don't like carbolic, but neither do all those wicked little harm-working germs!' Dear Beth, the main thing to think of when you see any form of suffering is what a blessed thing it is that mankind has been taught to be merciful, and to wonder what you can do to help the sadder side of the world."

"Just as you do!" cried Beth with a closer snuggle. "Only to think that Aunt Rebecca was afraid I'd be spoiled if she let me come to New York where you were rich and worldly!"

This time Mrs. Cortlandt did not try to keep back her laughter; it rang out girlishly. "You funny little Beth, there are two ways to love the world. One is to take all it can give you and pay no debt to it, but to live so selfishly and heartlessly, so wickedly, in all sorts of ways, that you help to make it a worse world than you found it. And the other is to take its gifts gratefully and try to repay them, and live so kindly, so lovingly, so purely that you leave the world when you die, a trifle better than when you came into it. And people with a little money can do either of these things as well as richer people. Don't you see, dear,

that worldliness and other-worldliness are in each heart, not in a safe deposit vault?" said dear Aunt Alida.

"Of course I see, Aunt Alida! I shouldn't wonder if people were worldlier when they hadn't much world and wanted it, than when they've lots of it," said Beth.

"Harken to the philosopher Elizabeth!" laughed Aunt Alida. "'Far-off hills are green,' chicken; I suspect that is often true. Now let us discuss giving instead of having. Tell me your Christmas list and what you mean to give each one on it. It is high time we were about our Christmasing."

"I don't have to make a list, Aunt Alida. I can easily count up all I want to give Christmas presents to; I did this morning, at breakfast. Only there are Natalie, Alys and Dirk; I couldn't put them in when they were there. And I never could think of a quarter of what they have, so I'm sure I'll never be able to think of one thing they haven't! I might just as well try to think of something for the Queen as for them! I was wondering if you could tell me, Aunt Alida?" suggested Beth.

"Alys asked me to get her a certain bangle. I'll leave it for you to get, if you like it, Beth. And Dirk wants a fountain pen 'that will fount,' as he says. Natalie—what was it Natalie spoke of the other day? A little hanging model of a Grecian lamp. She wants it to burn all night, instead of electricity or gas. Your eldest cousin is reaching the æsthetic age, Bethie! How would those suggestions please you? It is such a comfort to know what a person wants! I was going

to fulfil these desires of the children's, but I'll hand them over to you, if you like. We are on our way to the shopping district; you shall see the lamp and the bangle," said Mrs. Cortlandt, throwing herself into Beth's plans just as heartily as she lent herself to more important things.

Beth felt this and allowed herself to hug her aunt, albeit they were driving slowly down the western side of the park and emotions are not ordinarily displayed in the cars and carriages there.

"Aunt Alida, you are perfectly angelically darling!" Beth declared. "You never seem to think anything doesn't matter, and you never have one bit a there-go-along-and-play, child, and-don't-bother-me way! You don't even think it."

"Beth, child, how could I think all that? There aren't enough hyphens in my mind to string so many words together in my thoughts!" cried Aunt Alida. And, quite unashamed, she hugged Beth back again.

CHAPTER XI

KRIS KRINGLE'S JINGLES

“**I**T’S funny,” said Beth thoughtfully. “New York seemed to be doing all sorts of things when I came, and till now, and now it doesn’t seem to be doing anything else but get ready for Christmas.”

“Those are not really automobile horns you hear; they are Kris Kringle’s jingles!” laughed Natalie, pausing with the slender tip of her small screw pencil on her lip.

“What did Helen Van Voort send us last year, Nat?” asked Alys. Her brow was drawn by a vertical line of puzzle and her voice sounded worried. “I can’t remember whether she joined the C. C. C. or not, so I can’t tell whether to put her in the much or little column.”

“She sent us each a flower pin, don’t you remember? You liked mine better than yours. They were good ones. She belongs in the muchies,” replied Natalie.

Beth looked her curiosity over this cryptic conversation. Natalie saw the question in her eyes and laughed again.

“The C. C. C.’s are a club of girls. The three C’s stand for Commonsense Christmas Contributions. I named it. It means that the members will not go

above a dollar in buying Christmas presents. Some of the girls joined and some didn't. I'll tell you one thing: it sounds all right, and we did it because there is such a crowd of girls whom we all know that it runs up to a fearful sum to buy decent things for each one! Besides we know a few who are really nicer girls, come from better families, than some of the richer ones, yet who haven't enough to spend to afford fine gifts all around. But you have to work so hard to think up things for a dollar, and then spend so much time chasing around shops to get them, that you really might as well spend more than a dollar—it costs more than money to get through. Alys and I gave it up; some of the girls hold on. It's terrible to try to remember which are Three C's and which aren't! You must send little gifts to the members, of course, or they'll be disgusted that you got something expensive for them, when you're supposed to know they're C's." Natalie reached the end of this lengthy explanation with relief.

"But you have a long list!" cried Beth, glancing at the pad on which Natalie had been setting down names and at its counterpart on Alys's knee. Only in a few cases had there been an article written down after a name and of these several had an interrogation mark after them, showing that these articles had not been finally decided upon.

"About seventy-five, not counting the family and the servants!" cried Alys fretfully.

"But at a dollar apiece—would that be little to spend for Christmas?" asked Beth.

"Tell us about your Christmases, little Cozbeth," said Natalie gently.

"At home?" asked Beth, flushing. "Well, there aren't any big stores in town. Some people send to Boston for their presents; lots of people buy from catalogues. Of course we have a Sunday-school celebration. Aunt Rebecca mostly gives me sensible things, things I'd have to have some time. Janie and I ——" Beth stopped. She found it hard to describe the little gifts that she and Janie made each other with those long lists lying under her eyes upon her cousins' knees. For the first time since she had really known them, she felt half afraid of Natalie and Alys.

"Janie and you got each other some nice little thing that you each knew the other wanted, or else made something," Natalie said, with her mother's tactful kindness. "That's the best way to keep Christmas, but you can't help doing as Romans do when you're in Rome. Did you decide on everything you were going to get, Beth?"

Beth shook her head. "There aren't many people I know," she said, holding up a sheet of paper. "Janie and Daisy and Nell and Edith and May and Ruth—that's all the girls. I'm going to subscribe for magazines for Aunt Rebecca; she's crazy to read and she has used up 'most everything in the Public Library. I put down some sensible things for some people who haven't any money. And I'm going to buy a lovely rose pink dress for Miriam Gaines. She's a cripple from scarlet fever, but she's young and I'm pretty sure

she'd love a pink dress. People will all ask her why I ever in this world got her that, why I didn't buy her a dark wrapper that would be useful. But I'm going to get a sort of dancing dress, ready made, as rose colored as it can be, and I sort of know Miriam will have a fit over it. I believe she'll think she's going to get well, else such a dress wouldn't come for her; I can see her just living on it! And on Fourth of July, or days like that, I guess she'll get her mother to put it on her. I think Christmas presents ought to be lovely, useless things that make you think things like fairy tales, even if they never come true. It seems to match Santa Claus stories better than sensible things do. Maybe they are useful things, if they make people happy."

"Where could you have learned such heart wisdom, my Beth?" asked Mrs. Cortlandt. She had come in quietly behind Beth and her voice close beside her chair made the little girl jump. "That's the trouble with this campaign for useful Christmas gifts; people test usefulness by the sense of touch. If you three lassies are ready, we'll go shopping."

"We'll never be ready, mama," sighed Alys. "We may as well start out and get what we know we want; it will take nearly every day from now on, anyway."

Beth's eyes dilated, then she looked a little cast down. "It wouldn't take long to get my things, but I'd be glad to have them in the house a while to gloat over them," she said.

Mrs. Cortlandt laughed, as she always laughed at Beth's funny seriousness.

"Here is half of your Christmas spending money," she said, straightening Beth's hair ribbon by way of a caress. "Your uncle left me the hundred for you, but I brought you only half; you will have to shop more than once."

"Half!" cried Beth, turning pale at the thought of being responsible for such a sum. "Fifty dollars? Oh, Aunt Alida, you'd better let me leave almost all of that here! Aunt Rebecca carries large sums like that in the waist of her dress when she goes to Boston to shop—she doesn't often go! But I'd not have any place to carry it safely, because I button up in the back and I'd never be able to get it out."

At this speech Natalie and Alys collapsed and Aunt Alida fairly shook Beth in a funny ecstasy of enjoyment of her.

"Uncle Jim was quite right: you are an Anomaly and a Survival, you little animate New England primer!" she cried. "Keep your purse hand in your muff till you are ready to use the money, and touch your selections with one hand only! Meet me down-stairs in half an hour, lassies."

Aunt Alida hurried away with this injunction and Beth seized the opportunity to consult her cousins in regard to a gift for her, just as she had consulted Aunt Alida for them.

"Oh, no one ever knows what to get for mama," cried Alys. "Lots of her friends ask us, but we never know. We three are going to have our pictures taken for her and, if we can, we are going to get father to

sit, too. That would really please her, for there is no picture of him, except dreadful snapshot things, since we were babies. You have your picture taken with ours and we'll get them framed prettily. You have yours alone, and then in a group with Dirk and us, and help us coax father to sit, and that will be the best thing you could give mama."

"Isn't that a little—sort of conceited? In me, I mean. Not you, because of course she'd love a picture of her own children. But wouldn't it be queer in me to think she'd rather have my picture than—well, anything else?" asked Beth.

"Now, Bethie, don't pretend you don't know that mama loves you!" cried Natalie.

"Yes, better than our other cousins, her own nieces and nephews. She'd love a nice picture of you. There's a splendid place on the avenue where we're going; real portrait pictures they take," Alys chimed in. "Oh, and why not send one to all your old friends in Massachusetts—send it instead of a Christmas card, to tell them where your present comes from! And two or three different ones to your friend Janie."

"Alys has an idea, Beth!" added Natalie, refraining from suggesting what a hole this would make in Beth's Christmas allowance and privately resolving to get her father to pay so much toward these pictures that Beth should never know what their actual cost had been.

"Well," Beth submitted to their wisdom. "And for Uncle Jim? Is there anything on earth he wants? I

thought I'd like to make him and your mother something."

"Make father a case to carry his traveling slippers in," said Natalie promptly. "You can easily do it; just an oblong with a flap; he will put it in his bag when he goes away for a night. It is a case to keep the slippers from touching other things—a white tie, for instance! If we don't get ready we shall keep mama waiting. She always allows us enough time and then has no mercy on us for being behindhand. Mama demands punctuality from us in all our engagements."

"Aunt Rebecca always says 'procrastination is the thief of time' and that if I get into the habit of being late I'll be doubly dishonest, stealing my own time and other people's too. It's really strange how much alike Aunt Alida and Aunt Rebecca are in their way of seeing things, though they certainly aren't one bit alike any other way, and Aunt Rebecca never would believe they could be alike at all," said Beth scrambling her papers and pencil together and hastening off to prepare for her first extensive shopping on her own account.

It was noon when the Cortlandt car joined the line of its fellows skirmishing in and out before the doors of the great shops in and around Thirty-fourth Street. It deposited its four occupants at a vast plate glass doorway and disappeared to allow its successor to come up and to wait until it should be summoned to resume its passengers.

With what seemed to Beth like superhuman swiftness Natalie and Alys selected the gifts upon which

they had already determined, said briefly : "Charged and sent," and went on to the next purchase.

After a while Beth, too, woke up from her maze and decided upon her gifts for the girls at home. She found herself in possession of four bangles, almost alike, slender golden hoops, for the four girls who stood in the second tier of friendship toward her; these bangles were to be marked with the girls' initials and sent to her uncle's later, each in an alluring square box with white velvet lining.

She also found that she had bought for Janie an exquisite little circle brooch, set with sapphires, which, Beth foresaw, would match Janie's eyes, and which Beth found appropriate, as well as satisfactory, for the clerk assured her that brooches of this sort were called "Friendship circles," and that their endlessness was an emblem of true friendship, such as she knew hers and Janie's would prove to be.

Aunt Alida, too, bought in this shop, so glorified by great spaces, fine bronzes, glittering gems, that it seemed ridiculous to speak of it as a shop. She bought swiftly and decidedly, at times secretly, so that the lynx-eyed girls did not know what it was that she had quickly ordered "charged and sent." But she selected many things that Beth did see, with awe and admiration. Trinkets "for her girls' other cousins," she said, for her friends, silver mesh purses, beautiful things in leather and glass, as well as in gold, silver and jewels.

Beth recalled the three little shops at home, the gimcracks that were not pretty, nor useful, which ap-

peared in them at this season, Janie's and her own shopping in them, their long discussions over articles that cost about a quarter, or half, of a dollar, for which they had long saved their spending money! She deliberately pricked herself with the pin of Janie's brooch to see if she were really here in the body, not dreaming in her small iron bed, in that far-off Massachusetts chamber which was hers.

Natalie saw her do this and demanded the reason for it.

"Nothing," said Beth blushing. "Have you other cousins, Natalie? I haven't any but you. It seems queer that you have any but me."

"Mother's sister's boys and her brother's girls," replied Natalie. "The girls are in California; Aunt Justine is not well. The boys are living in Washington, the state. Uncle Hubert wanted them to study scientific agriculture, so he bought a big farm there. I suppose they will come east again. Of course you haven't any cousins but us; father had no other sister but your mother, no brother. Oh, I forgot there might be Bristead cousins! Aren't there?"

"No," said Beth. "My father was the youngest of five children and the other four died of diphtheria, all together, when he was a baby. It must have been awful for their mother. Of course it kept me from any Bristead cousins, too."

"We will lunch now, my dears; it is high time," Aunt Alida interposed just then, opportunely, for Natalie hardly knew how to reply with proper

sympathy to this story whose tragedy seemed spent and impersonal now.

Aunt Alida took her three to lunch at a place of the utmost perfection. Beth was getting used to imposing restaurants and they no longer took away her appetite. But the music of the small, but excellent orchestra made eating difficult; Beth was helpless under the spell of good music. Aunt Alida had chosen this place for its orchestra, knowing how Beth would enjoy it; for her own part she preferred music and eating separate.

"Is that three-quarter, or four-four time, Aunt Alida?" Beth asked after a long silence.

"Six-eight, dear. Why? And I didn't know you had been taught music," cried Aunt Alida.

"I was beginning to be taught; a new young lady came to live in our town and she was teaching me. I hadn't gone far. The reason I asked was that I was trying to eat my roll in time and I couldn't make my teeth keep right with four-four counting. No wonder, if it was six-eight! I didn't have much in six-eight time, but I like it; it seems to go right along, so smooth and nice," said Beth.

And this speech caused Alys to choke so violently over her lunch that it was a long while before she could stop coughing and eat again in any time whatever.

"I think I shall send Anna Mary with you to do some of your shopping, Beth," said Aunt Alida. "She can take you to places where you can buy your serviceable articles for the people at home who have, as you said, 'no money,' and where you can find the

rosy evening gown at lower prices than in this neighborhood. It will not matter if the dancing gown is not the very last utterance of fashionable magnificence, will it, dear?"

"No, indeed!" cried Beth. "I've been wondering if there weren't any places in New York where they kept bargains. I think a bargain evening dress would be just the thing for a lame girl who wouldn't ever wear it, don't you?"

"I really do," smiled Aunt Alida. She laid a crisp bill on the salver the waiter offered her and arose without waiting for him to return with change. Nothing so impressed and distressed little Beth's frugal mind as the reckless way in which her aunt and uncle left change to be gathered up by those who served them in public places.

"Now, girleens, no more shopping to-day!" announced Aunt Alida as they entered the car. "I am going to a tea this afternoon and this evening to the opera, so I must rest and dress for the tea. Natalie, you and Alys and Beth had better ride; the afternoon is beautiful. I hope Dirk may be found to join you. We'll drive around by the stable and tell Tim to be ready to go with you at—half-past three." Aunt Alida consulted the tiny watch on her wrist before mentioning the hour.

"That's good! I've been wishing for Trump, Aunt Alida," cried Beth.

"I've no doubt he wishes for you, or at least would like to go out," said Aunt Alida. "Beth, what else do

you wish for? You are too big to write letters to Santa Claus, so you must be big enough to consult on your own Christmas presents."

"Aunt Alida, there isn't a thing, not one thing that I really want," declared Beth earnestly. "There are lots of things I see that I'd like to have when I see them, but I see so many that I forget what they were the next minute. I honestly believe I'd like a doll that was very, very beautiful. I always thought there must be a perfectly lovely doll in the world, not like any I ever saw. But I couldn't play with her if I had her, because when you get old for dolls they seem to stand off and not play with you. I'm just crazy about them, but I don't know what to do with them the way I did. Janie could help me, but I couldn't do it alone. So I don't need even the doll. It is just like 'Hush, my dear, lie still and slumber'; don't you know? 'All my wants are well supplied.' And they certainly are."

"Couldn't Alys and I play dolls with you?" asked Natalie.

Beth shook her head decidedly. "I don't believe you could have played dolls with me if you were Janie's age; Janie's not as old as I am," she said. She looked at Natalie and Alys's charming costumes, at their dawning young womanhood with penetrating eyes. "You are too far-off," she added. "Alys is farther off than Natalie, though she is younger. You have too much. When you get bigger you have to want something in order to love dolls. I can't play with them, but I love to cuddle them."

"So do I, Beth," said Natalie.

Mrs. Cortlandt looked at Beth, wondering for the unnumbered time at the thoughtfulness that this simple little girl sometimes displayed. When it came to heart knowledge, Beth always seemed to understand profound things that she could not possibly know.

"Yes, I guess you would like to cuddle them, Natalie," said Beth, regarding her oldest cousin attentively. "Your eyes look cuddly."

Aunt Alida telephoned the stable after they reached home, to save time, and sent the girls thither in the car after they had put on their riding habits. Dirk proved to be at home and he joined the riding party.

Tim had been bidden to ride beside Beth who, though she had by this time ridden several times in the park, was still lacking in self-confidence. Another groom accompanied Natalie and Alys, who were good riders, for such young ones, and who needed no more than an attendant should anything go wrong.

"I can't help being glad, Tim, that Trump is no taller," said Beth, as she and faithful Tim turned in at the park entrance in the rear of the small cavalcade. "It would not be far to fall off, if I had to fall."

"No, Miss Beth, and I'm suspectin' that had something to do with Mr. Cortlandt's pickin' the pony for you. That and his gentleness," said Tim. He had become utterly devoted to Beth since he had esquired her. "She was that quaint and old-fashioned and sweet," he told Mrs. Tim at home.

"I thought it was, Tim. I'd be afraid on a real

horse, but Trump is like a footstool. He trots beautifully, though, doesn't he? And he is the sweetest thing! I'm afraid to begin to love him, because it will be spring so soon and I'll have to go home and leave him. But I don't have to *begin* to love him, because I just worshiped him the moment I saw —— What is that, Tim?" cried Beth sharply, interrupting herself.

"Sure it's some kind of a to-do with a child," replied Tim.

Tim on his horse and Beth on Trump hastened forward; the rest of the party was already out of sight around a curve of the bridle path. A small crowd had collected at a point a short distance ahead of Beth and her escort; they saw the gray form of a tall park policeman dominating it.

"I'll have to run you in," Beth heard the policeman say as she came up.

"Oh, what is it?" cried Beth, and a boy beside her explained that the forlorn little girl, whom the policeman held by the arm in a state of collapse, had been accused of snatching a lady's purse and throwing it into the shrubbery on the mall beyond the bridle path, intending to find it later. But that the lady had felt the child's touch and had pursued her here, whither the small footpad had run to escape her.

"Oh, I'm sure she didn't!" cried Beth, slipping from Trump's back to Tim's horror and pushing her way over to the child. "You didn't steal the purse, did you?" she cried.

The child looked up into the anxious face, scarcely

older than her own, but far plumper, rosier and happier. She saw the pity in the sweet blue eyes and her own dark ones filled with tears.

"No, miss; oh, no, miss!" cried the little creature. Her thin body shook with sobs and she broke into passionate weeping, interrupted by Italian words.

"Why, there's a purse!" cried Beth. Her eyes had spied a mesh purse dangling on the end of a long silver bar, held by a silver chain around the neck of the child's accuser. The bar sustained an immense pillow muff. The muff nearly hid the purse, but its gleams chanced to fall under Beth's eyes as she looked at the excited woman, who was eagerly clamoring for the arrest of the small robber and her immediate deportation to the reformatory. "Is that the purse you lost?" cried Beth.

The woman looked down, lifted the purse as if she suspected it of being capable of further tricks, and detached it gingerly from the muff bar.

"It was twitched—I suppose the muff bar caught it——" muttered the woman, and stopped, ashamed of her accusation and annoyed by the angry murmurs of the knot of people which had collected.

The poor frightened child, who had been in danger of arrest, sank in a pitiful heap of sobbing weakness on the ground, utterly unable to stand when the relief from her danger brought its reaction.

"I'll walk, Tim, and let her ride Trump; it isn't far," said Beth. "Get on my pony, dear; he's very low and very gentle; all you'll have to do is to sit on him. I

can't ride, but I never have a bit of trouble staying on," added Beth to the prostrate little victim.

"No, Miss Beth dear," said Tim, inexpressibly touched and pleased. "I wouldn't dare let you walk home, in your habit, too; they'd sure be blamin' me. Here, boy; go call a taxi and there'll be a quarter in it for you," added Tim to the boy who had explained the situation to Beth. "Be quick with you!"

The boy ran off, open-mouthed with admiration for this little lady who had appeared in time to effect such a rescue.

Natalie, Alys and Dirk rode back with their groom to find out what had happened to Beth. When they heard the story Alys was half inclined to be annoyed at the oddness of it, but Natalie beamed on unconventional little Beth, and leaned over to pat Trump as a means to squeeze Beth's hand slyly.

"You are going to be a little Saint Elizabeth, doing something for the unlucky ones all the time; I see that!" whispered Natalie.

"What a right all right you are, Beth Bristead!" cried Dirk, forgetting his audience and speaking aloud.

"She surely is!" cried a red-faced old gentleman standing by. "And I'm glad to learn her lovable little name."

Beth was thankful when the messenger returned announcing that the taxicab, which he had fetched, was waiting at the head of the next path leading out from the bridle path to the drive.

"May I go with Dirk to see her off, Tim?" asked Beth.

"Sure; I'll wait ye here," replied Tim, already with Trump's reins in his left hand.

Beth and Dirk led the trembling little Italian-American to the cab, escorted by a considerable proportion of the crowd. As they put her in Dirk asked her name and address.

"Annunciata Carmaldo," the child told them, and that her home was quite across the city, in Second Avenue. She seemed to find the cab a species of smelling salts, for she revived from her fainting condition and began to sit up erect, even to assume small airs of importance, the moment she took her place within it. She bridled behind the doors which shut her in, her dark eyes peering over them, like a small seal in a tank.

"Maybe we shall see you again some day," said Beth, bidding her good-bye. And, to her great embarrassment, the child leaned out and kissed Beth's hands, raising them to her brow with fervor of adoration, while tears ran down her thin, pretty face, telling Beth of the gratitude for which the small Italian lacked all English words.

"Now that," said Beth emphatically to Dirk as the cab rolled away and she and her cousin started back to their mounts, "that is what I call an adventure!"

"Were you really going to put that little Italiano on your pony and walk home, Beth?" asked Dirk, eyeing the little girl as if she were an entirely new specimen.

"Yes, of course; why not?" said Beth.

Dirk looked at her again, slapped his leg and laughed.

"Well, if I ever!" he cried, not explaining to Beth's eager questioning what he meant.

That night Beth sat in her aunt's room watching her made ready for the opera. It was an unfailing delight to Beth to see her beautiful aunt robed in her evening splendors, to watch the wonderful costumes adjusted and the flashing jewels placed in her dusky hair and on her white throat, scintillating among the laces on her breast.

Aunt Alida was to Beth the embodiment and illumination of all her dreams, a sort of combination of a royal princess, a fairy queen and a household goddess and mother whom she might worship, but must love. It had become a habit with Beth, and, consequently, with her cousins since she had come among them, to go to Mrs. Cortlandt's room when she was dressing for a great occasion to absorb her loveliness and do her homage. Aunt Alida found no flattery that she received later in the evening in the great world half as sweet as this admiration from her children.

To-night Beth thought Aunt Alida had never been so beautiful—but she thought that each night! Anna Mary fastened a tiara of diamonds on her lady's hair and clasped a long chain of perfect blue-white stones around her throat.

"You look like Iris!" cried Beth, as she caught the rainbow colors that flashed at her from the jewels.

"What do you know of Iris, small niece?" asked

Uncle Jim, entering in sequence to his knock on his wife's door.

"I know she was the rainbow and so is Aunt Alida," Beth answered. "You look just as nice, in all that white linen front, as Aunt Alida does, Uncle Jim, but men can only be fine and nice; they can't be wonderful."

"Dear me, no; I should never so much as attempt to be wonderful, Bethie," laughed Uncle Jim. "What's this I hear about your wanting to give your pony to a beggar maid, while you walked? Saint Martin divided his cloak with a beggar; I don't know which of the saints, if any, gave up his undivided horse to one."

"She wasn't a beggar, Uncle Jim," Beth set him right. "And it was only while she was faint and had to get home. Was it wrong? Dirk roared laughing at me, but he wouldn't tell me why."

"It's an unlikely thing to happen in New York," said Uncle Jim.

"In New York? Oh! It's—I suppose it would be something like my wearing the aprons here I used to wear at home?" Beth looked meditative.

"Do you like New York, Bethie?" asked her uncle, tipping up the thoughtful face.

"I just love it!" cried Beth fervently. "I used to be sort of jealous of it, in history, you know, its being settled before Massachusetts. I had to remember it was settled by the Dutch, and that Massachusetts had the Pilgrim Fathers to get over that 1614 date, when Plymouth was 1620. But now I don't mind at all;

I'd just as lief. It's such a splendid place and it's so good to me and I'm so happy here that I wouldn't care if it had been Lief Ericsson settled it in the year 1000!"

"That's fine and generous of you, Elizabeth, and I thank you in New York's name! But after all it was settled by your Cortlandt ancestors, so you needn't mind," said Uncle Jim.

"I don't think I ever realized I had Cortlandt ancestors then," said Beth. She sprang up to hug him—carefully, because of his easily-crushed expanse of linen—for she thought her last speech made him look sorry.

CHAPTER XII

THE HIGHWAYS AND BYWAYS

“**I**T’S always nice when you begin,” said Alys.

The three girl cousins were gathered in Natalie’s room doing up Christmas gifts. Rolls of white tissue paper, of crêpe paper figured in glowing poinsettia and holly; yards and yards of Christmas ribbons, white, with holly or poinsettia designs, or plain holly red; tufts of jewelers’ cotton clinging to everything it should not touch and leaving fuzzy white down behind it when it was removed; Christmas seals of varied designs and Red Cross seals; piles of cards; higher piles of holly boxes of all sorts and sizes; labels asking aimlessly that something should not be “opened until Christmas,” all these things covered the room “except the walls and ceiling,” as Beth had said. She had added that it “was nice when we began,” showing that she was getting a little tired of the work, and Alys had retorted that it is “always nice when you begin.”

Beth had only a few packages to do up; they lay together, completed, and now she was helping her cousins with what looked like their endless task.

“It’s pretty hard to keep up the way you begin in

anything," said Natalie thoughtfully, disentangling the end of the last opened piece of poinsettia ribbon from a roll of plain red. "It's fun getting things around and starting in, but you—one—get—gets so discouraged when things are all around and mixed up!"

"I wouldn't try to use two pronouns in one sentence, Nat; that is what *I* call mixed up," laughed Alys. "Better stick to 'you,' if you start with it, even if it isn't so elegant. Well, all I know is my fingers are turning into chop-sticks; they're getting all stiff and queer tying these little fiddling bows of narrow ribbon! Wouldn't it be easy if we could order Christmas presents sent right to the people from the stores?"

"With price tags on and the shopping slip done up with them, instead of a Christmas card?" suggested Natalie. "No, I don't mind getting tired doing this, because it adds at least as much again to the presents to have them come done up so fascinatingly. I wouldn't care for mine if they came in brown paper, so I'm willing to work to make Christmas nice. But I'm ready to own up that it's the hardest job I ever have in the whole year."

"Mama won't let us hand it over to any one else to do," Alys explained to Beth. "She says it isn't the right idea at all to have the maids do it. I suppose it isn't."

"No; I can see that," said Beth. "It wouldn't be so hard if we hadn't got everything out at once. It's so—crazy!"

"Have to," said Alys. "Else you'll find you used

your boxes wrong, or used up all one kind of paper that you simply had to have for something else."

"I've got the worst job of all!" said Dirk, coming into the room, followed by his mother. Dirk wrote so plain and good a hand that his share of the Christmas preparations was to address the packages. In return for which the girls did up his gifts for him. It is doubtful if Dirk appreciated this; it would not have troubled him if he had handed each of his boy friends a present, quite unadorned, with the brief remark: "Here; that's for you!"

"Not anything like through, are you, girls?" asked Mrs. Cortlandt. "Don't get too tired. If you can't finish, Natalie may sleep in one of the guest rooms, or with Alys, and you may leave everything as it is when you stop for the day, and resume in the morning at the point you leave off."

"I wish Natalie would sleep with me!" cried Beth. "My presents are done up, Aunt Alida. That pile, there."

Aunt Alida had quick vision for shadows on young faces, quick ears for tones in young voices. She thought that she detected wistfulness in Beth's face and voice then, and rightly interpreted it as a half wish on Beth's part that she had as many friends to make merry on Christmas as her cousins had. And Aunt Alida never saw anything that she might improve without at once trying to improve it. She had an inspiration now.

"I wonder how it would do for Bethie to have a tree and invite the guests to it?" Mrs. Cortlandt suggested.

"Beth! Why, she doesn't know ——" began Alys and stopped herself.

"No, I don't know any one but the girls' friends, the Tanagers and Bluebirds, and those girls," said Beth, finishing Alys's sentence for her.

"I don't mean that sort of a tree, Beth! And you do know one girl whom we don't know at all—An-nunciata Carmaldo, wasn't she? And Liebchen is rather especially your acquaintance," said Aunt Alida, smiling down on Beth. "I mean a tree for girls who may not have a Merry Christmas without it. Suppose we have a fine big tree set up in—perhaps the billiard room? And trim it and light it as well as we know how, and let it be Beth's tree, and let Beth issue the invitations! She can get introductions to poor people through—let me see! I think Anna Mary would help us splendidly; she is exceedingly good and charitable under her glum exterior, and is constantly working for the poor herself. We might let this tree be our only tree this year and for ourselves do something else—a hunt for presents, or something of that sort. What do you all say to giving Beth a Christmas party, a tree for children who need happiness?"

"Fine, beautiful mother!" approved Natalie with a warm look in the dark eyes which smiled at Mrs. Cortlandt.

"Say, wouldn't that be great! Fun alive!" cried Dirk.

"I think it might be very nice indeed," said Alys slowly.

Beth had risen, dropping all the Christmas materials which filled her lap.

"Aunt Alida," she said earnestly, her eyes moist, shining through the rapturous tears, "all my life long I have thought how perfectly beautiful it would be if I could do something like that! You read about it in books, you know, how rich girls have trees, or something, for poor children. I think I'd be so happy I couldn't bear it to have a tree like that! Do you think they could sing hymns around the tree? I do love hymns, 'specially Christmas ones. It wouldn't be my tree; it would be all, every bit yours, but if you called it a little bit mine I'd be so glad! It would be so much like Bethlehem, you see."

"Gee!" exclaimed Dirk too surprised to help it. "Why?"

"Oh, I don't know. All the poor shepherds, and bringing poor children in, and—and 'suffer little children,' you know," stammered Beth, too embarrassed to put her thought into coherent words.

Mrs. Cortlandt drew Beth to her and kissed her with great tenderness.

"Little Elizabeth, are you going to be one of those who love, like your namesake, the 'sweet Saint,' Elizabeth of Hungary? Dear heart, we will have the tree and if you can give my children some of your sense of the approach to Bethlehem it will be more than a merely Merry Christmas, my precious little niece," she said softly.

That afternoon the great tree was ordered. It was

a beauty, so big that the dealer who sold it had been fearful that it might not find a purchaser.

Suddenly Beth found herself swept into the vortex of rapid, late Christmas preparations on a mammoth scale. Aunt Alida insisted that all possible decisions should be left to Beth.

Beth, at her aunt's suggestion, asked Anna Mary to help her to select the guests.

"Do I know any poor children, is it, Miss Beth?" cried Anna Mary. "Do I not? Sure they do be no lack of them in a big city! I have a niece that's a Sister of Charity and there'll be no trouble whatever in her puttin' us on the thrack of as many destitute little ones as we want. I myself know five families this minyute which has thirty-five children between 'em, all between three and fourteen years of age. And that's a good start for us."

"Thirty-five! Five into thirty-five—that's seven apiece, Anna Mary! Isn't that a lot?" cried Beth.

"They're not divided up just evenly, Miss Beth; one family has nine and one has but four. But sure it is a lot, and more than a lot, for there isn't enough to take care of the quarter of 'em in a way even plain folks would call takin' care of 'em," said Anna Mary with feeling.

"Aunt Alida said about fifty would be right, but she said not to worry if there were one or two children over. She doesn't want to leave out any we find, who really ought to come, just to keep to a certain number," Beth explained.

"I'm to go with you and the young ladies to the photographer's. Miss Natalie arranged it with her mother that we might have a while too long, so we could go to the photographer's unsuspected by Mrs. Cortlandt. Then you and I are goin' huntin' for guests, Miss Beth. Mrs. Cortlandt said I might take you to the children's homes, if I was sure there'd be no diseases for you to catch," said Anna Mary.

"I had chicken pox—twice, Anna Mary, and whooping-cough and measles when I was small, and last year I was a sight with mumps, so there can't be much for me to take. I'll be ready in half an hour—you said half an hour, Anna Mary?" asked Beth.

"Half an hour, Miss Beth, if you please. And Miss Natalie said she had picked out what you were to be photographed in; Frieda laid out some frocks for her to choose between, and I have the one in the case our young ladies are takin'. It's a fine white one, Miss Beth, quite simple, and most suited to you. Miss Natalie has wonderful taste for so young a girl," added Anna Mary, seeing the question in Beth's eyes.

Beth found the photographer's another item in her list of "things that were different." At home one climbed two steep flights of stairs to get to the photographer's studio and after this breath-taking feat, one found it a small room, stuffy with mixed odors of chemicals, littered with photographs on sundry tables standing about and with dismaying groups and single enlargements, framed in dark mouldings, standing against the walls.

Here one arose in an elevator to enter a still and tasteful reception room, white with the light of the top floor of a large building, and was shown into a dressing room, quietly sumptuous, where a maid was in attendance, in case the visitor had not brought her own maid to make her ready for the great business of a portrait.

Anna Mary being in attendance upon the three young girls, the "stationary maid," as Natalie called her, was not required. Anna Mary laid out the three white frocks in which the girls were to be photographed and then dressed them. She shook out Natalie's abundant hair, her glorious hair, so dark, yet full of warmth, full also of bends and turns and wilfulness. She brought Alys's pale hair forward where it would show to the best advantage, and brushed Beth's fine masses of shining gold into a mist that was hard to curb. Then they were ready and went out to take their places before the camera. Here two surprises awaited Beth. One was Dirk who, having steadfastly refused to be one of the party, had altered his mind at the last moment and now appeared in his finest attire, grinning sheepishly.

The other surprise was the photographer who was a woman! It had never occurred to Beth that a woman could do more than take Brownie snap-shots, but this woman proved entirely capable. She posed the group of four skilfully, with the grace and dignity of a portrait by Reynolds. Then she photographed the three Cortlandts together, Beth insisting on a group without

her. Then each one separately, till at least a dozen negatives had been made and the artist—for the name rightfully belonged to this photographer—expressed herself satisfied with her results.

“Just one more—you with me, little Cozbeth!” cried Natalie. “I want it as a Christmas present to myself.”

Beth willingly agreed, and for a moment the dark hair and the fair hair blended as the two girls were posed before the camera, Beth's face upturned to Natalie, Natalie's handsome head bent downward to the younger girl whom she was beginning to love with a fervor that surprised herself.

“Now we part, Bethlein,” said Natalie, this picture taken. “Alys and I are going to lunch with Hedda Gabbler.”

“With—what is her name?” cried Beth, emerging from the skirt Anna Mary threw over her head.

Natalie laughed. “That's the name of a play; we call Doris Belmar that because she's such a talker,” she explained. “You're going with Anna Mary, slumming. Don't get stolen, or murdered or anything! Good-bye, Beth.”

“Good-bye,” echoed Beth, and her cousins left her to follow them a few moments later, Dirk having taken himself off with evident relief the instant the last picture of himself had been secured.

“It's a taxicab we have to use to-day, Miss Beth; your uncle has the small car and your aunt is usin' the horses, after the young ladies are left at Mrs. Belmar's.”

So saying Anna Mary handed Beth into a cab that they found waiting at the door, and then stepped in herself. She had sent the case containing the frocks home by a messenger.

"I'd just as lief have a taxicab, Anna Mary. I think I like them better," said Beth as theirs started. "I play I am in a boat and that the crowds are what the books call them, 'a sea of faces,' and we go plunging right through the waves. I'm always a dolphin or a mermaid."

"Well, Miss Beth, it's not a play that I'd care for, both of them bein' fishy and I'm not partial to fish, nor to the sea, for I was that sick when I came to America that I never went back, though my youngest brother do be still livin' near by the city of Cork and I've plenty cousins at home in Ireland," said Anna Mary, with her serious air of superiority. "This is gettin' over to the poor parts, Miss Beth, which so far you've not seen," she added.

The cab was going eastward and then northward. "First we shall find that little Italian girl you saw in the park," explained Anna Mary.

Beth murmured an assent, but she was too much occupied with the new scenes before her to do more. Rapidly the New York she knew was changing into something as different from itself as her old home was different from it. Shabbiness was creeping over it like a sort of cloudy twilight. The buildings looked battered; so did the people passing them, and swarms of children, who were too small to go to school and too

small to play on the sidewalk, were nevertheless playing there in every block.

"It's here," announced Anna Mary when the cab stopped. She helped Beth out, gathered up her skirts and gingerly led the way into a tenement house.

"Try not to touch the railin', Miss Beth," said Anna Mary, mounting the stairs.

Anna Mary knocked at a door which proved to be the right one. It was opened by a woman dressed in bright colors, gold hoops in her ears; a black-eyed baby, held against her shoulder, frowned timidly at the sight of strangers.

The woman seemed to speak little English, but to understand perfectly what Anna Mary said when she explained slowly, in carefully chosen words, that Beth was the little girl who had been the means of saving Annunciata from arrest as a thief and that Annunciata was to come on Christmas eve to a tree at Beth's home. Anna Mary laid down a card that bore Mr. Cortlandt's name and address, explaining that this was to tell Annunciata where to go.

"Ye-es, a-tanka you. I not speeka, Annunciata speeka. I un'erstan', no speeka, me. Annunciata glada go see. Lika lil' lady moocha, say great times tanka she. Annunciata coma sure—sure!" said the woman with a smile that revealed two rows of gleaming white teeth.

Beth smiled her best to supply deficiencies in the conversation, but the room looked dreary to her, though it was not half as bad as those she was to see later. Some attempt at decking it had been made. A

bright lithograph of Raphael's Madonna della Sedia hung on one side of the room, on the other another high colored lithograph of the crucifixion. Paper flowers and a decorated candle stood on a shelf beside the first picture; there was something besides mere eating and drinking and their scarcity here, but poverty was written plain on the room. Beth felt a shocked pity, as if New York, which had been so abundantly kind to her, was not hospitable to these emigrants.

She followed Anna Mary back to the cab and peered thoughtfully out over its doors as they went on, through various streets. They stopped when Anna Mary, consulting a list given her by her niece, the Sister of Charity, indicated that they should stop, and, getting out, climbed dark stairways, to wind through darker passages, filled with indescribable odors that had the effect of having been there for ages, and entered homes that consisted of two or three stuffy, forlorn little rooms, sometimes of but one room. The pleasure that Beth had imagined they should confer was rarely shown. The children might be glad later on, but the mothers to whom they announced the Christmas tree took it stolidly, sometimes almost suspiciously. It did not seem to make them glad.

After a while this pilgrimage led Beth, with Anna Mary, to the five families of which Anna Mary had told Beth, the five with thirty-five children among them. None of the others had been as poor. They lived on one floor. There was little light in their rooms, but this may have been a good thing, for there

was too much revealed by what light there was, too much and too little. There was no adornment here, only the least furniture, and yet hardly any space. But the worst was that the mothers looked so pitifully thin and worn, so dull-eyed and gray of skin. Beth noticed with surprise that Anna Mary's forbidding manner fell from her like a shell which her heart had pierced, that she was soft of voice, tender of touch, mild-eyed and very, very gentle in these barren places; altogether a new and lovely Anna Mary.

"It's goodness!" thought Beth correctly. "It's goodness and kindness and it must be there all the time! She's a dear and she must come here often, for they know her so well! So she's not just Anna Mary, who is a maid that looks as if she wore taffeta inside and out; she's a good, good woman!"

And this was an important discovery, not merely because it set Anna Mary in her true light, but because it showed Beth that goodness was the one real thing that counted.

At last the visits were all made and Anna Mary put Beth into the taxicab for the return home. It was a quiet Beth that looked out over the infolded cab doors with her big, gray-blue eyes, seeing the melancholy streets through which they were passing as part of the poverty which she had, for the first time, realized to be a fact.

Anna Mary watched her, unseen, and finally aroused her from her thoughts.

"Is it plannin' the tree you are, Miss Beth, that

you're so quiet?" she asked, though she knew Beth was not thinking of the tree.

Beth turned to her with a long, indrawn breath.

"No, Anna Mary. It doesn't seem as though there could be trees," she said. "Is it like this all the time? And in all those houses we didn't go into?"

"Maybe it was too hard on you seein' it, Miss Beth," said Anna Mary sympathetically.

"But New York isn't all splendid and happy, then," said Beth. "I thought it was a fairy-land."

"There do be bad fairies, Miss Beth. All big cities have the two sides to 'em, the grand side where people spend money like water, and the awful side where even water is scarce. Then there's a fine lot between; people workin' hard, but gettin' good times out of it and nice, comfortable little homes. I think your Aunt Alida wanted to learn what you'd make out of seein' these miseries," said Anna Mary.

"Can we help it?" asked Beth. "I never can, because I shall not be rich myself, but can any one?"

"It's a great puzzle, Miss Beth," said Anna Mary. "No end of things there are makin' and keepin' these people poor. The wisest and best heads in the world are always puzzlin' over helpin' it, and by this and by that they're always thinkin' they've found the cure, but it's not so easy. Sure, you can help it, Miss Beth. Helpin's not curin', but if every one helped, then the cure'd be worked. And as to your bein' poor, do you imagine your aunt and uncle, havin' found you and found you what you are, lovin' you as they do, won't

take care you have plenty to help with, if you're minded to use it that way?"

"Will they?" cried Beth, plainly not thinking of this in connection with her own life. "How shall I help?"

"First off it needs wantin' to, Miss Beth, real wantin', so other things don't crowd it out. And then it takes lovin', lovin' in the right way, so you don't mind when the poor unfortunate people disappoint you and are ungrateful, or turn out ill. Then the way can't be missed. It's much the kind of lovin' that was shown all His life long by our dear Lord, whose birthday you're goin' to make glad for the children you've been askin'. And the only way I know to help the people is His way; just go about teachin' and feedin' and maybe dyin' for 'em, if needs be, prayin' they be forgiven for they know not what they do." Anna Mary spoke with profound emotion in her usually dull voice. Her face warmed and quivered with feeling and Beth sat looking up at her, drinking in her words, her own sweet little face responsive to the chords Anna Mary touched, her eyes dimming with tears, yet kindling with her inward resolve to help in this way, if the opportunity came to her.

Beth put her hand over the back of Anna Mary's when she stopped speaking.

"I'm glad I came with you to-day, Anna Mary. I think you have shown me better than even Aunt Alida could; you seem to know closer, if that's the right way to say it. And I'm glad you are the one that came for

me, to fetch me from Aunt Rebecca's here. Maybe it means that some day I can help and you are going to show me how and were sent to fetch me for that reason, only no one knew it then," she said in her earnest way.

"Bless the dear child!" said Anna Mary fervently. "Sure, Miss Beth, I've loved you from the first minyute I set my two eyes on you! Now don't be thinkin' sober thoughts so near Christmas and you but a slip of a girl! All you must think of now, dear little Miss Beth, is that you're going to make fifty-three of these poor children perfectly happy at the tree; we've asked fifty-three, Miss Beth!"

"Isn't it splendid!" cried Beth, brightening. "But is it right to forget, Anna Mary?"

"It wouldn't be, if broodin' over poverty did any good, Miss Beth," said Anna Mary sensibly. "But worryin' never did, nor ever will help anything; more by token it works the other way, makin' the worrier no good when the time does come to help. It's plain now you're meant to be a happy little girl, enjoyin' what's sent you with a grateful heart. It's a mystery, Miss Beth, that one has and the other hasn't, but so 'tis! The way I look at it is that God is a weaver, weavin' our lives and all the world, and not one of us sees the pattern He's set. But if we're a gold thread in it, then we must let Him use us like pure shinin' gold in the pattern. And if we're just a bit of gray wool, or maybe cotton, we must let Him weave us in just as satisfied. Sure, when it's all made and done with, what difference will it be whether we're less or more?"

"Oh, Anna Mary, what a lovely, lovely little sermon!" cried Beth.

"I didn't get the weavin' idea out of my own head, Miss Beth," said Anna Mary honestly. "But it's been a great comfort to me since first I saw it in a bit of po'try."

Beth ran up the steps of her uncle's house, her seriousness dispelled by the last part of her drive. The gay splendor of the avenue late in the afternoon, the line of prancing horses and beautiful private motor cars, coming back from the park, the promenaders, the children so perfectly dressed, so rosy, so well-tended, swinging and pulling along on their uniformed attendants' hands, who could believe that this city was the other side of the one Beth had just left and who, at eleven years old, could, or should, resist its brightness?

"Say, Beth, the tree's come!" cried Dirk from somewhere up-stairs the moment Beth was admitted. He slid down the banisters and came up like an acrobat, with a bow before her. "They've set the tree up in the music room. Mama decided we'd need the organ and piano and things; she's had canvas laid to save the floor. That oak floor's her joy. But maybe it isn't a tree! Well, I guess! Come on and see it before you go up-stairs. How many poor kids did you catch?"

"Fifty-three. We couldn't possibly leave out any, and Aunt Alida said not to mind if there were a few over fifty," said Beth, following Dirk. "Dirk, it's exactly like the parable, going out into the highways

and byways, you know, to make them come in to the feast."

"Well, wouldn't you think they'd fall all over themselves to come? Ought not to take any making, ought it? How's that? Isn't that a peach of a tree?" added Dirk, throwing open the music room door with a flourish.

"I never, never saw such a tree—except growing," cried Beth in a rapture, but tempering her statement to the exact truth. "Dirk, let's play we are Druids, going to be converted on Christmas, but Druids now. And let's pay it homage. Big evergreen trees always make me want to worship them!"

"How would you do it, play Druid?" asked Dirk, interested, but at sea.

"I don't know; let's sing 'O Tannenbaum'!" suggested Beth. So taking hands they sang the beautiful German song to the pine tree, though Dirk could not carry a tune well, and Beth's German went no farther than the first stanza, which she had once learned in school.

CHAPTER XIII

“ HOLLY AND JOLLY RHYME ”

CHRISTMAS eve was a busy one. Other years the young Cortlandts' tree had been trimmed for them, but this year the fact that the tree was intended to give poor children pleasure seemed to alter every one's attitude toward it.

Beth took it for granted that she and her cousins were to trim the tree themselves, and it so fell out. Beth was given authority over it, as it was to be her party, and, after she got over being afraid to decide any question put to her lest she should decide wrong and spoil the tree, she enjoyed her dignity just as much as she enjoyed the glittering ornaments of many sizes, colors and clever designs which had been ordered in dozens for her tree.

She asked to have Tim from the stable “to do the ladder part,” as she put it. Tim was sent for and came willingly, glad to have a chance to do something for Beth that was not in his regular line of employment, and which therefore seemed particularly a personal service to her.

Tim was as full of quips and quiddities as his race usually is and, while the trimming of the tree progressed, got his young employers into gales of laughter with his nonsense, his wit and pranks. At last, when he danced a breakdown on the top rung of the ladder

—or pretended to—whistling an Irish air, with his face a network of laughing wrinkles, the children laughed till they begged Tim to stop, in mercy to their aching sides and weakened knees.

“ I never thought it could be so much fun, just getting a tree trimmed for a Christmas tree,” sighed Beth. “ I don’t wonder holly and jolly rhyme ! ”

“ So does melancholy,” suggested Natalie.

“ Melancholy doesn’t rhyme with holly all the way through ; it doesn’t rhyme in meaning, but jolly does. Melancholy rhymes only at the very end—when it stops being melancholy ! ” cried Beth, with an inspiration, much pleased with her own cleverness in making this discovery.

“ Bright Beth ! ” applauded Alys. Beth felt as though she hardly knew Alys to-day, she was so gay and merry, with all her stiff little ways gone, frolicking like the big-little girl she really was.

“ Oh, say, Tim, you mustn’t smoke up there among those branches, honest ! ” cried Dirk peering at Tim on his lofty perch near the ceiling of the high-vaulted music room.

“ I’m not smokin’, Master Dirk,” said Tim, stooping to peer back again, his short pipe in his mouth.

“ You’ve got your pipe in your mouth,” persisted Dirk.

“ Faith an’ I’ve got me foot in me shoe, but by the same token I’m not walkin’ ! ” said Tim with his chuckle. “ It’s just suckin’ it I am, Master Dirk, for the comfort of its society ! Do you want the string

of bells, sort of like a wreat', just below the highest angel at the top, Miss Beth, or do you want them glitterin' things that look like white of eggs an' mercury, mixed, to make dyin' by mercury poison easy?"

"Oh, Tim, you are so funny!" sighed Beth, for Tim's remark about his shoe had sent them all off again in shrieks of laughter. "I think the bells, please."

So Tim festooned the strings of party-colored bells just below the top of the tree, singing the while in a high falsetto:

" 'Tis the bells of Shandon,
That sound so grand on
The pleasant waters
Of the river Lee."

"Now the tree is done!" cried Alys, clapping her hands. "And there never could be a more splendid one! I'm going to see if mama is in and call her to look at it. Then we must get dressed. What time is your party coming, Beth? Six?"

"No, five. Don't you remember Aunt Alida said we would have the children come early and dine at half-past eight?" replied Beth. "You may as well come down, Tim; there won't be anything more to do with the ladder."

Alys had hurried away and returned with her mother, sleepy and pretty, in a Japanese embroidered robe in which she had been taking a nap.

"Nobody around, is there?" cried Mrs. Cortlandt,

peeping into the room. “Except Tim, and he’ll never tell that I came down-stairs in a wrapper! Alys wouldn’t let me delay. Children dear—and Tim and everybody that helped”—she glanced at one or two of the maids who had been working on the tree—“I never, never saw a tree that was more grand and glorious! It’s not only Christmasy and shining, but it’s actually beautiful! And truth compels me to say that not all Christmas trees are that! And doesn’t it look big, now that it’s trimmed? What fun it is! Beth, if your little forlornities aren’t overwhelmed with delight they won’t be mortal children! You must go to get dressed; do you know that it is nearly four o’clock? Dressing is going to take you longer and be different from your expectations! No, indeed; you needn’t ask a question for I won’t answer one! I’ve a Christmas mystery of my own and I’m going to defend my rights! Tim, did any one tell you that we expect you to bring your wife and children here to-night?”

“No, ma’am. But we’re not expectin’ it, ma’am,” said Tim. Beth saw that Tim was ready to worship this lovely young Aunt Alida, whose girlish happiness was not feigned; it bubbled up and overflowed out of a heart that wealth, the world and its pleasures, flattery and the power wealth gives had not tainted. Aunt Alida was, before all the things that she had to be to the outside world, a loving, home-loving woman; her merry way of enjoying little things, as well as big ones, sprang from simple goodness.

"Well, perhaps you aren't expecting to be bidden to our tree, but we certainly expect and intend you to come, Tim, with Mrs. Tim and all the Tiny Tims!" Mrs. Cortlandt laughed at her own application of Tiny Tim's name. "I don't know in the least why you weren't asked, except that we decided on Miss Beth's party so late and have been in a mad rush ever since! Be off, Tim, and collect your family and come here with them at five. Hurry; there's not a moment to lose! I'm so sorry no one told you you were coming! Wait! Call up your wife and tell her to begin to dress the children; it will save time. Mr. Cortlandt put a telephone into your house, didn't he? So I thought. Call up your wife, then, and tell her I truly beg her pardon, but to forgive me and hurry the children here. Wait a moment! Léon is coming; I heard our horn and our engine. Tell Mr. Cortlandt I asked him to let Léon take you home and bring you all back in the car. Dirk, go with Tim and explain to your father how Tim's invitation was forgotten and ask him if Léon can't help us out. Be off, Tim; run, Dirk!"

Thus issuing her orders like a sort of breezy May morning, with the cherry blossoms of her rose-colored gown's embroidery wrapped around her, Mrs. Cortlandt sent Tim and Dirk on their errand, and turned to her three girls.

"Scatter, lassies!" she cried. "You've lots to do to get ready, and lots to be ready to do!"

Natalie snatched Alys's and Beth's hand and rushed them out of the room. Mrs. Cortlandt lingered long

enough to give directions to the maids for setting the room in order and making certain changes in its arrangement, then she, too, hurried after the girls, and called to them as they went to their rooms :

“I’ve selected your toilets, chickens. Please put them on as fast and as well as you can and be downstairs promptly at five.”

Beth opened her door with confident expectation of finding some new delight awaiting her. Was there really no limit to Aunt Alida’s cleverness, prompted by her loving heart ?

“I hope I’ll be able some day to do something for her !” she said aloud.

Frieda looked up. “I’ve just had word from home, Miss Beth,” she said, her cheeks crimson, her eyes shining. “Liebchen is coming here to-night ! She has walked without crutches. She is cured ! Oh, Miss Beth, Miss Beth !”

“Oh, Frieda, Frieda !” echoed Beth, hardly less moved. She threw her arms around Frieda, who kissed her hot cheek, neither remembering any difference in position between them, both overwhelmed with a common joy.

“What a beau-ti-ful Christmas gift !” cried Beth. “I was sure she wouldn’t get here because we didn’t hear a word. Aunt Alida told me I must hurry, Frieda, so I suppose we must put off being glad till to-morrow. It’s a comfort that we shall be just as glad next year !”

“Forever, Miss Beth !” said Frieda. “If you hadn’t

spoken to your uncle Liebchen could not have been cured. I'd die for you and your good, good uncle and aunt !”

“So would I! I mean for them!” And Beth laughed. “Is that my frock? Won't it frighten the children if I'm too fine?”

Across her bed lay a white lace gown, filmy and exquisite over its white silk slip.

“They won't see the frock, Miss Beth; there's a—something to wear over it. The frock is for you to wear at dinner when they're gone; there'll be no time to change,” explained Frieda.

“I don't understand,” sighed Beth, contentedly resigning herself to Frieda's work on her hair. It was so delightful to be in the midst of mystery and to postpone its solution a little longer!

Frieda shook out the little girl's golden hair and brushed and brushed it till it shone and flew around her shoulders in masses of living gold, stirred by every breath. Then Frieda put white silk stockings and white slippers on Beth's feet and slipped carefully over the fly-away hair, first the soft white china silk undergown, then the gown of white lace, as filmy as a web.

“It makes me look like a dandelion field with a big cobweb over it, my hair all loose, and this webby lace,” said Beth, surveying her reflection with unspeakable delight. She recalled the plain gowns, shrouded in aprons which she had worn in her old home, with a wave of pity for Aunt Rebecca.

“Aunt Rebecca thinks it's wicked to love to look

nice, but it isn't; it's just being glad. Flowers and clouds and birds, everything is pretty! I'm only glad the way they are! Poor Aunt Rebecca; I hope she isn't lonely without me now! She got a letter from me to-day and I tried to put things she'd like in my box for her! She does love molasses peppermints and sugared almonds, and I sent lots of them, and some nice books and fine towels and handkerchiefs, and—lots of things! I had to write her that it was my own money, or she'd be afraid Uncle Jim was buying things for her. Poor Aunt Rebecca! It's hard to make people have a good time when they're out of the habit of it. What's that, Frieda? What in all the world is that?” she added hastily, for Frieda was bringing out a spangled garment and a long veil and pointed cap, also shining at every turn.

“You're all to be Christmas fairies, in costume, Miss Beth,” announced Frieda in high glee. “Your aunt planned it as a surprise to you and your cousins, and to make the party more wonderful to the poor children. Yours is white and gold, as you see; Miss Natalie's is red with bits of pink, the way some roses are shaded. And Miss Alys has the most splendid green, a shade that shows by electric light. Master Dirk is to wear blue velvet and white, half and half, with cap and bells, like the pictures you see of the men that made jokes for kings ——”

“Jesters,” murmured Beth in a stunned way.

“And—but I mustn't tell about your uncle and aunt!” Frieda stopped herself. “Please bend quite

low, Miss Beth. I must try not to muss your hair and gown when I put on the costume."

Beth bent her head, too overcome to say a word, and Frieda dropped into place the loose gown, all in one piece, that fell to her feet, completely covering her own gown. It was a golden silk, overshot with white; it shimmered at every motion, and it was girdled and trimmed across the breast with rhinestone chains that were almost as brilliant as diamonds. A pointed cap of gold, like a big extinguisher, crowned Beth's golden head next, and from it floated a veil of the thinnest gauze, all spangled over with tiny beads that took the light and gave it back like dewdrops in the sun.

"I have to blink at myself!" cried Beth, swaying and prancing before the glass. "Did you ever, ever see anything so sweet! And so shiny? Frieda, how can Aunt Alida do such things, how *can* she? I'm a fairy, myself, Beth! I've been in fairy-land all this time and now I'm one! I'll never get over this, never! I don't know who I am, but I'm splendor than Beth was and prettier, and ——— Oh, dear, oh, dear! Talk about Merry Christmas!"

There really seemed to be danger of Beth's going off into a sort of swoon of joy; her shining marvels so overcame her. But at that instant Natalie and Alys came hurrying to Beth's door, calling her excitedly, and Beth came to life with a shout that would have done credit to Dirk and a loud: "Come in, come in!"

Natalie and Alys opened the door and stood for an instant within it.

“My goodness me!” gasped Beth. “My goodness gracious!” she added as Dirk joined them.

Dirk was a jester, clad in a beautiful motley of white and blue velvet, fitting him like a sheath. His cap was hung with tiny bells, he carried the jester’s wand, his shoes were the slender pointed-toed affairs of the pictures, his round boyish face, red with excitement and fun, looked like a kewpie’s peering through the cap front that encircled his chin. But Alys and Natalie! Alys in a brilliant metallic green, a straight, smooth mediæval sort of gown, like Beth’s, with gold trimming, and a head-dress in the shape of a holly leaf, with gold imitation coins on the points! And Natalie, surpassing them all in beauty, in a similar gown of red velvet, slashed with pink, a cap covered with holly berries, and imitation rubies studding her waist and binding her throat, her dark beauty set off by the gorgeous color that would have extinguished a less handsome girl.

“It’s really awful, it’s so splendid!” gasped Beth, while her cousins went into raptures over her white and gold which turned her into a fairylike creature, contrasting beautifully with their higher coloring.

“We’re going to have something by and by where we can wear these things with some one to see them besides the poor kiddies,” said Alys decidedly. “You’re beyond words, Beth; we all are. If mama can’t do things right, then no one can! Hurry down; it’s time. I imagine there are a lot of youngsters here already; they probably will come early. It will be a mercy if

we don't have to send them home in ambulances ; these costumes ought to finish them ! ”

“ Oh, my dears ! ” cried Aunt Alida meeting her young folk in the hall. “ How more than satisfactory you are ! Are you pleased with my surprise for you ? Do you like the costumes ? ”

“ I guess *like* isn't the word for it, ” said Dirk. “ But what's the matter with you ? ”

“ Nothing, I hope, ” laughed Mrs. Cortlandt. “ I'm Frau Santa Claus. ”

Aunt Alida wore a white gown with a white cloak swinging from her shoulders, and a white cap, wreathed with mistletoe and holly, with a single great poinsettia on its left side. Holly and mistletoe encircled her waist and fell like the ends of a girdle on her white skirt. The cloak and cap were made of material as thin as would submit to a bath of alum in which they had been dipped. The alum had crystallized on the cloth and the cap and cloak looked as if they were made of snow crust, glittering under the electric lights.

“ Aunt Alida, you are—I couldn't say what you were ! ” Beth managed to say.

“ Prettiest thing in old New York all the time, but the greatest ever to-night, ” said Natalie, pretending to catch one of her mother's lustrous dark strands of hair under her cap, though it had not gone astray.

“ Well, if you aren't the greatest mother on earth to get up all this, and keep it to yourself ! ” cried Alys, also finding her voice. “ Is there a programme, mama ? ”

“I am Frau Santa Claus, you are Christmas spirits ; we shall see Herr Santa Claus a little later,” said Mrs. Cortlandt. “As to the programme—I don’t know, precisely. You must each do all that you can to be jolly and to entertain, and we’ll trust to inspiration for the way as we go along. I think Christmas hymns first, however. I am having the children ushered into the music room now. Mr. Leonard is here to help us. He will announce the programme and lead the singing. Hark !”

From below came the sound of feet scuffling and trying to march to the strains of an orchestra. The children were all assembled and were going in to behold the tree.

“Orchestra, mama ?” asked Natalie, for this was a further surprise.

“A small one. I thought at the last moment how much it would add to the pleasure of those poor little souls,” whispered her mother. “Now we must go down.”

She led the way in her snowy raiment to the music room and her attendant Christmas spirits followed her, in single file, to spread out the little procession as long as possible. The music came up to meet them, the old Christmas hymns played perfectly by a famous little orchestra. Beth was deeply impressed and much moved ; it seemed to her like all her dreams of Christmas, all the romance of olden time with which her little brain was well stored, made visible and audible.

“Mrs. Santa Claus and her four Christmas fairies are

coming, children!" Mr. Leonard called, making himself heard above the music. And Mrs. Cortlandt and the children came in.

The music room was nearly filled. The servants of the Cortlandt household were gathered there; Tim and his family had come in good time, thanks to Léon Charette and the car. There were a few of Mrs. Cortlandt's intimate friends, who had begged to be allowed to see the fun, and Natalie, Alys and Dirk had invited a few of their favorite friends. For the rest the room held only the poor whom Beth and Anna Mary had searched out, except Liebchen, who stood—*stood*, if you please!—having the best time of any one, no longer a cripple, but a sound, healthy, joyous child, forever cured!

The faces of the children of the tenements were a study. Wide-eyed, half-frightened, wholly bewildered, they clutched one another, listening, looking, not understanding, but entirely sure that nothing half as blissful as this night had ever crossed the bare fields of their brief experiences.

Slowly Aunt Alida led her four beautiful followers into the room, herself a vision of beauty. Awe fell upon the poor children and there was a sound as if they all drew in a long breath together. The tree blazed with a hundred electric lights, in small bulbs safely nestling amid its green needles and its shining ornaments. Beth had not realized when she was helping trim it how glorious it would be. Its slender top reached high up into the vaulted ceiling. An angel,

poised above it, seemed to have called it up into being with his outstretched hands.

“Mrs. Santa Claus” and her train went back toward the organ. At a word from her the organist began to play “Come hither, ye faithful.” Then the orchestra and organ repeated it, and Mrs. Santa Claus called: “Sing, children, sing for Christmas!”

At first few sang besides her own children and the servants, but soon those of the poor children who could sing and who knew the hymn—and they were many—joined, till at the last stanza there was a fine volume of song, though words were largely lacking. One after another Mrs. Santa Claus called for the best, the dearest of the Christmas hymns and the children sang them, getting intoxicated with the sound of their own voices blending with the orchestra.

“Hark!” cried Mrs. Santa Claus as the last note of “Silent Night, Holy Night” died away. Stillness fell upon the room. “I hear bells!” cried Mrs. Santa Claus. “It must be that my husband, Santa Claus, is coming!”

Sure enough. Faint, but clear, came the sound of sleigh-bells, then it grew louder, was near! With a bound and a boisterous “Hurrah!” into the room burst Santa Claus himself!

“Three cheers for Santa Claus!” cried Mr. Leonard, and led the cheers which nearly took the roof off, for this part of the programme suited the guests.

“Hallo, kids!” cried Santa Claus. He was a noble personage, all in red velvet, whitened with snow,

icicles hanging from his fur-trimmed cap, toys bulging from his boots and many pockets. "Any boy here got a horn?"

Not a boy had, but Santa Claus had foreseen the lack and had come provided.

"How can you make a lot of noise without horns?" he asked.

Turning to a great hamper that had been brought in behind him, he pulled out no end of horns and summoned half a dozen boys to distribute them.

"Oh, may as well give 'em to the girls, too," Santa Claus chuckled. "They aren't always so fond of being quiet, either!"

"Now," announced Santa Claus, "I'm going to give out a present or two I've brought for some of you. Each one of you has to stand up and take what I send you. And after each present is given, blow your horns, every one of you, and make a Merry Christmas of it!"

"Oh, Jim, it will deafen us!" murmured Mrs. Santa Claus, who in real life, also, was this gentleman's wife.

"Nonsense, Alida; the kids won't have a good time unless they turn loose some sort of a hullabaloo!" Santa Claus whispered back. "We've got to stand it. Come, Snow White, it is your party. You go with me giving out presents."

Beth looked frightened. "Not unless the others go too," she said.

So Natalie, Alys, Dirk and Beth began the little pilgrimage around the room, distributing presents. There

was a carefully prepared list of names and a package for each one which held the useful, warm things that each particular child most needed—Anna Mary had found out what these were—and with them were toys, candies, nuts, fruit in abundance. As each name was called and “ Snow White ” put into each pair of red, roughened hands the gift that they were to carry away, a fearful blast of tin horns arose, quite ear-splitting and unbearable, but which, after a few repetitions, wrought the children into a frenzy of joy and effectually broke up the last remnant of awkwardness.

It took a long time to give out the presents ; Santa Claus beckoned one or two of his friends, who stood laughing, covering their ears, yet enjoying the scene immensely, to help Mr. Leonard and himself with the task.

At last it was done and in the lull that followed Dirk and his boy friends trundled into the room four great freezers of ice-cream, set on flat wagons and decorated with Christmas greens. Then several of the Cortlandt servants, who had left the room, returned, carrying baskets of dishes and spoons, and trays heaped with cakes, iced in many colors.

“ Well, what d’ye know about dat ! ” cried a small person, newsboy by profession, with such deep emotion in his voice that the entire roomful, great and small, shouted and the speaker tried to crawl out of sight on the floor, to which he immediately dove, but was fished up and set back on his chair by a relentless sister, a year his elder.

There was enough ice-cream for every one to have two big helpings and cake for each one to eat his fill. If the children did not recognize their treat as furnished by a famous caterer, they did know that "it wa'n't no slouch ice-cream," as one child said, but decidedly superior to that sold from the tail of pushcarts in their own neighborhood.

"Now, children dear, our Christmas tree has dropped all its fruits for you. There isn't anything more for us to do but to say good-night, because you have far to go, many of you. Did you have a good time?" asked Mrs. Santa Claus of the entire roomful.

"Yes, ma'am!" "You bet!" "Sure thing!" came back her answer in various forms, but with one clear meaning.

Suddenly a big boy got on his feet, pushed up decidedly by many hands. He looked red and miserable, but he stuck to his guns.

"Dey want I should give you t'anks, all of yous. It was great, biggest ever. An' we hopes yous all will git de best what's comin' any place. An' we wishes yous de biggest luck nex' year. Much obliged."

"Hurrah!" shouted Santa Claus. "It is we who are much obliged to you for coming!"

Whereupon the orchestra played the gayest airs it could and the guests reluctantly filed out of the beautiful room, turning back again and again to look at the tree, shining in its Christmas green, pointing upward. It told the children, if they had been wise enough to understand it, that the spirit of Christmas is from above

and that it makes unfading spring time in a frozen world.

“Take off your costumes, children. Dinner will soon be served, though I don’t see how we can any of us eat it! I’m deafened and worn out with that riotous celebration—but it was beautiful! Your party was a success, Bethie!” said Mrs. Cortlandt.

“*My* party!” echoed Beth significantly.

The children laid aside their costumes, not without regret, and appeared in their proper persons at dinner. Half a dozen of Mr. and Mrs. Cortlandt’s friends remained to dine and Natalie and Alys were allowed to ask a girl apiece.

After dinner they went back to the music room. Once more the great tree was illumined; the servants were called in. The Cortlandts distributed presents to their household, while the orchestra, which had been retained, played softly and a sense of peace, of profound peaceful joy, seemed to descend upon them, after the late hubbub. But it was the peace of the memory of that earlier good time and that they had given more than half a hundred children the Merry Christmas that otherwise they could not have known.

Beth found herself snowed under with white parcels, tied with the Christmas colors. As gift after gift came into her overflowing little hands, she grew pale with excitement and sat down on the floor with them all in her lap, too burdened with emotion and too many gifts to stand up. Here she opened boxes and saw in a dazed way a little watch, such a ring as she had coveted hope-

lessly, books, pins, trinkets of all sorts, and at last even the perfect doll which she had said that she would like if she were not too big to play with it. And she knew the moment she saw it that it was so lovely that in some way she should shrink to the proper size to play with it.

All the rest were getting presents, the servants, too. Beth felt that no one could describe this sort of Christmas so that a person who had not seen it could realize it. She foresaw herself trying to describe it to Aunt Rebecca and Janie, and failing.

When the other packages were opened and examined Beth slyly opened one that had come to her from Aunt Rebecca. It was with doubt she opened it, fearing it might be something that her cousins would find droll. But it was a miniature, a beautiful painted miniature that she had never seen before. Aunt Rebecca had put a card in its case and on the card was written in her fine, old-fashioned hand: "This is your mother's picture. I hope you will have a pleasant Christmas and be a good girl."

Beth quickly closed the miniature case and hid it in her frock. She did not want to show it to her mother's family then; another time, when there was less excitement, she would show it to Uncle Jim and ask him if it were like his sister.

"Each one must do something to entertain us," announced Aunt Alida, when the gifts had received full attention.

The Cortlandts were accustomed to this. Uncle Jim sang a song and did some clever imitations. Aunt

Alida also sang—she sang beautifully—and she and Natalie danced a curious folk dance that Beth thought was wonderful.

Alys recited; she had a dramatic gift. Dirk “did stunts,” as he put it, fenced with Mr. Leonard, and showed his own athletic powers in solo.

“Bethie, we can’t let you off,” said Aunt Alida. “Please, dear! What can you do? Sing? Recite? You aren’t too tired?” For Beth was looking pale from her many emotions of the evening.

“No, Aunt Alida, but I don’t do anything nice,” said Beth mournfully.

“Recite something you have learned in school, honey,” suggested Aunt Alida.

“I don’t know anything for Christmas, except the second chapter of St. Matthew. I learned that by heart,” said Beth timidly.

“There could be nothing better, darling,” said Aunt Alida. “Please tell us that story, Bethie.”

So Beth arose, pale and frightened, and began that simple gospel. Her voice gained strength as she went on, forgetting herself, remembering it was Christmas eve and carried away by what she was saying.

“That was best of all. It was like a benediction on our Christmas festival,” said Aunt Alida kissing her as she ended.

CHAPTER XIV

DIRK ENTERTAINS

THE Sunday after Christmas found Mr. Cortlandt kept in the house by a cold. Beth sought him out in the evening and found him beside his library fire. The logs burned cheerily, snapping and crackling; the red flames and impish sparks looked most alluring on this cold night.

Beth came across the thick carpet without a sound of a footfall; in her hand she carried the miniature which Aunt Rebecca had sent her at Christmas.

"Uncle Jim," she said, pausing.

Mr. Cortlandt started. "Why, Elizabeth-Beth!" he cried. "You must have caught me napping. You made me jump. Glad to see you, puss. Come enjoy my fire with me. Isn't this a fire to enjoy?" He put out his left hand and drew Beth down on the arm of his big leather chair, within the circle of his arm.

"Fires look so glad, fires in fireplaces," said Beth, perching herself close to her uncle's shoulder. "When they are burning houses they dance even more, but they never look glad then; only cruel. I suppose it is because in fireplaces they are doing their best to make us warm and happy. Aunt Rebecca had the front of the old fireplace at home torn out. They had boarded



"I'VE BEEN WAITING TO SHOW IT TO YOU."

it up for a stove. Now it is the biggest, splendidest fireplace! Sometimes we can get wood from the sea-shore—the sea is about nine miles from Aunt Rebecca's—and when we do we have the loveliest fires, all colors in the flames! Uncle Jim, see what Aunt Rebecca sent me. I've been waiting to show it to you."

Beth held out her hand with the closed velvet case of the miniature in its palm. Mr. Cortlandt took it, opened it, and Beth heard him draw in his breath sharply as he leaned backward and held the miniature over the back of his chair to allow the light from the reading lamp to fall on it. For a moment he did not speak, then he said:

"Do you know how your great-aunt came by this picture, Bethie?"

"I didn't when it came, but I had a letter from Aunt Rebecca yesterday and she told me about it. My father had it painted. Aunt Rebecca has had it laid away all this time to give me when I was old enough to appreciate it, she says; I never saw it in all my life till it came on Christmas eve. You know who it is? Is it good, Uncle Jim?" Beth asked anxiously.

"It is perfect," declared Uncle Jim, and his voice was husky. "Know it, child? I not only know the miniature, but I know a great many things when I look at it that I wish I could have known years ago. But I was too young, too heedless, too thoroughly a boy to know these things then. If you look in the glass, Beth, you must see for yourself that it is an excellent likeness of your girl-mother, for it is also a good likeness

of you. You are like her, Bethie, but you are graver, your eyes are not as laughing, until something makes you laugh. My little sister Nannie overflowed with gaiety that was in herself; she was a merry, soft-hearted kitten, but there was a fund of strength beneath the gentle affectionate ways, as she proved, as she proved, poor, steadfast little Nannie!"

Mr. Cortlandt was silent for a while and Beth did not interrupt his thoughts, though she longed to ask questions.

"Beth," Mr. Cortlandt began again after a few moments, "you said something one day not long ago that gave me a pang. Do you remember when you told me that you had once been jealous of New York's superiority in age to Massachusetts? You also said, when I told you that your kindred had a part in its beginnings, that you had not realized then that you had Cortlandt relatives. It made me feel sorry and ashamed to know that this must be true."

"Oh, but Uncle Jim, I know now! It doesn't matter! I suppose I always knew my mother had relations. I meant I never thought about them," cried Beth, her cheek instantly rubbing against her uncle's, as if to efface all regrets he might feel.

"Your part of it is all right, Bethie; mine isn't," said Uncle Jim, stroking the fair hair which tickled him. "Tell me; what do you know about your mother? What has your Bristead great-aunt told you?"

"Not much. I know she died when I was just born

and my father died four months before that. I know she wasn't old a bit ; only twenty-three, but that is on her stone, if you count up. When my father knew he couldn't get well he took my mother to Aunt Rebecca. I think that's all I know. Aunt Rebecca never liked to talk about my mother. She always said she would by and by. I didn't know whether that was because she liked her too well to talk about her, or not well enough. It would act just the same on Aunt Rebecca. Of course I wanted dreadfully to hear about her ; any girl would," Beth ended with a suggested appeal to her uncle now to supply her lack of knowledge.

"Wouldn't my knee be more comfortable than the chair arm ?" asked Mr. Cortlandt. "That's better, more cozy, too ! Well, Beth, I am going to tell you about your mother. I was five years older than she was, so I ought to have been more sympathetic, have stood by her. But in justice to myself I think I may say that I did not in the least realize, as I do now, that she must have longed and hungered for a brother's kindness in those bitter months of her widowhood ; indeed I did not realize anything about her, feeling that she had chosen her own lot and that it would all come out right in the end. I was entirely occupied with my own young life just then. Nannie was a lovely little creature ; she was trusting, gentle, loving, obedient, but when she fell in love with your father she never could be persuaded to give him up. Your father was a fine fellow, Beth ; the Bristeads were good old stock, as you evidently have been taught, and he was all he

ought to be. But he hadn't a cent in the world, and no certainty of having much more, so your Grandfather Cortlandt forbade his tenderly cared-for little daughter to marry him. Father was afraid that Nannie would suffer. But Nannie would not give up your father. Instead she gave up her home and its luxury and married him. My father was furiously angry, angry with Nannie for disobeying him, still more angry with your father for letting her share the risks of his future, and he had not forgiven either of them when the end came, so swiftly that there was no time to heal the breach. As you say, your father had taken his young wife to his father's home and to the care of his father's sister when he found he could not live. Miss Bristead was too proud and too angry on her side that her nephew should have been forbidden to marry the girl he chose, to let my father know when Nannie's husband died. If Nannie could have lived I know that my father would have sent for her to come back and that she, with you in her arms, would have nestled into her old place in her home. But Nannie died and father was crushed, heart-sick with the worst of sorrow, regret for a separation that death had made permanent. He was more than satisfied to leave you with the Bristeads; he died four years after Nannie's death. I have always had in mind to look up Nannie's child, but the years slipped away without doing it. I, too, have had my share of the pain of self-reproach that I thoughtlessly left my little sister to her fate. Thoughtlessly; not unkindly, I am glad to say, for I never shared father's

anger against Nannie. I heedlessly took for granted that she was where she had chosen to be and that it was no affair of mine. So you grew up a real little Beth Bristead, not knowing, as you said, that you had Cortlandt relatives, till this winter. At last I aroused to action and sent for you. Tell me, in your mother's name, that my carelessness is forgiven. For we love you so much, Beth, dear child, that neither your Aunt Alida nor I, nor your cousins, for that matter, will ever again let you slip out of our grasp."

Beth kissed her uncle by way of an answer that she could not give in words. The sad story of her girl-mother's brief life had been told so simply that she understood it, as far as any one, old or young, ever can understand what they have not lived through themselves.

"Was it very wrong for my father and mother to disobey Grandfather Cortlandt and marry?" asked Beth at last.

"Wrong, dear? Well, I am sure that they did not think so. I am certain that they believed that they loved each other so truly that it would have been wrong to act otherwise," Mr. Cortlandt said. "But, yes, it was wrong, though I am confident they did not see it. I have two daughters of my own—and a niece!—and I should not be willing to let them take the chance of poverty. Older people see these things differently from romantic youngsters. Nannie and her lover ought, at least, to have waited till he had proved what he could do for her. They were young enough

to afford to wait. But that is just why they could not wait; young people never think they can waste a year or so. It is only when there aren't many years left that people begin to see that there is plenty of time. That is a contradiction which I do not expect you to understand, Bethikins! Ah, well! That story has had finis written against it this many a day! I am sure that Nannie was happy for the short time allowed her, and I doubt she was ever sorry that she braved all things for your father. In any case her marriage gave you to us, little Beth, so if the story that is finished has a sad ending, the sequel to it is the happiest one possible."

"Aunt Rebecca has tried very hard indeed to make me grow up properly," said Beth, with the funny little gravity that was the result of this same "proper" growing up.

"I don't suppose there could be a better foundation than her old-fashioned, strict training," admitted Uncle Jim. "Your Aunt Alida is the best person in all the world to build beautifully on that solid foundation. Between us all, Beth, you ought to turn out an ornament to your sex and a glory to your country."

Beth laughed, as her uncle intended her to; he thought there had been enough serious talk and he wanted to see Beth's eyes dance and her dimple come.

"I may as well tell you, niece of mine, that your 'Wonder-Winter,' as I hear you call it, is to be followed by a Wonder-Summer—or I hope it will prove

one! At any rate you are going with us to our summer home. It is a pretty nice place, Beth; we think it is most beautiful, house and grounds and neighboring ocean, and all our friends say so, too. We have a little theatre there where my children give plays, and we sail and bathe and are happy all the day long, and every day. You and Trump will revel in it, I'm positive. So make up your mind that the winter wonders will melt into greater summer wonders for you, Bethi-kins, my dear."

"Oh, Uncle Jim! Isn't that splendid! I've been dreading spring!" cried Beth. Then her face fell; she drooped in every muscle of her body. "But Aunt Rebecca!" she sighed. "Don't you think she must be lonely, Uncle Jim?"

"Truth compels me to admit that I don't see how she can help missing you, Bethie," her uncle conceded. "I have written to her, putting before her the fact that she has had you ten years and a little more, while we have only had you this winter—though that is our own fault; that makes it all the worse! I asked her to tell me if she got on fairly well without you, reminding her that we could do a great deal for your happiness and to your advantage. Miss Bristead has replied briefly that she is getting on well, that she would not consider making any claim upon you that kept you from your best good, and that if you wanted to stay with us longer and could assure her conscientiously that you were safe, and not being harmed, she would consent to sparing you. So, unless you think

we are doing mischief to you, Beth, ours you are to be for a long time to come."

"Oh, doesn't that sound just like Aunt Rebecca!" cried Beth. "She's so afraid I'll not be nice! But she wouldn't stand in the way, if she died getting out of the way—I mean in the way of something best for me. She is good; Aunt Rebecca really is good! But perhaps she won't mind much if I'm gone just this summer longer! There's so much to take up your mind in summer—preservings and cannings and fighting flies! Aunt Rebecca won't let one fly pull his head forward and rub it with his feet in her house the way they do. She flaps him with a folded newspaper before he can twiddle his feet once! She has a great deal more to take up her attention in summer than she has in winter. Oh, Uncle Jim, I guess the honest truth is I want to think Aunt Rebecca won't care if I'm away, I want to stay so dreadfully, dreadfully much!"

"The greatest good of the greatest number! On that principle you ought to stay because there are so many of us to one Aunt Rebecca, and we want you to stay 'so dreadfully, dreadfully much'!" Mr. Cortlandt affirmed this statement with a pat on Beth's shoulder.

At this moment Beth's girl cousins came into the library, followed by Dirk with an air of wishing there were something to do better than following them.

"Where in the world are you, Beth?" cried Alys, unnecessarily, since her eyes were on her cousin as she

spoke. "We've looked everywhere for you. What can you and father be doing in this dim light?"

"Beth and I have been chatting in the firelight, Alys," Mr. Cortlandt replied for Beth. "Dim light and brilliant talk often go together. Though has our conversation been brilliant, Miss Bristead?"

"It has been nice," said Beth decidedly, slipping from her perch, recognizing that the quiet hour she had enjoyed so much was over.

"I'm going to have a Twelfth Night revel—in the afternoon. You're asked," Dirk announced to Beth, meeting her in the hall a day or two after New Year's.

"Beans in cake, king and queen, all those things?" cried Beth eagerly, instantly reverting to her favorite ballads and romance at the name of Twelfth Night.

"Beans! Beans in cake! You mean raisins, don't you?" asked Dirk staring.

"No. But it was only one bean; I remember now. Whoever got the bean in the cake was king of the revel," explained Beth.

"Well, I'm the king of my own revel, only there isn't a bean about it and I'm not going to say I'm running it. I'm not going to ask one single girl but you. I suppose Nat and Alys will be around, but I'm not going to ask them; maybe they'll have something else on the go. I've asked the boys and you. We're going to have it in the gym. Bob Leonard'll come. You wear that white and gold thing you had on at the Christmas tree. We're going to play something that'll just come in to fit. Will you come, Beth?" Dirk ended anxiously,

as if he feared his taste in revels might not appeal to Beth.

"'Course," Beth accepted briefly. "Do I have to know ahead what the game is?"

"No." Dirk shook his head hard. "All you'll do, most likely, is sit around and look the part. You're to be a captive white princess, if you want to know, and we're going to have a tournament, an Indian tournament, about you."

"Fighting? Does Aunt Alida know?" asked Beth nervously.

"Sure she knows, has to order the eats, doesn't she? Don't get scared, Beth; nothing'll happen," Dirk assured Beth kindly.

Natalie and Aïys had no more desire to go to Dirk's Twelfth Night party than he had to have them come. He scorned "a lot of girls"; they looked down on "a little boys' party," so they were quits, each faction comfortably superior to the other.

The girls went to lunch and to a *matinée* party with a friend of theirs. Beth found herself wondering whether the honor of being the one girl invited was not going to prove a burden. She watched Frieda making her pretty in her Christmas white and gold costume with no little dread of this Twelfth Night revel.

Dirk was waiting for her on the stairs. She found him a forbidding brave in Indian costume, feathers, paint, tomahawk and all, and his whoop hailing her sent her heart to the soles of her feet, though she knew him, of course.

"Dirk, they won't all yell like that, right in my ears, and flourish a tomahawk, will they?" Beth protested.

"Oh, come now, Beth, be a sport!" Dirk reasoned with her. "I suppose they will, else what would be the use of dressing up like Indians? You stood the Christmas horns, you ought to be able to stand boys yelling. If I'd thought you were going to be finnified-fine-ladyish, like Alys, I wouldn't have asked you, either."

In her heart Beth wished he had not, but she felt in honor bound not to be any more disappointing than she could help.

"All right, Dirk; I won't mind—much, and I'll play my best. What do you want me to do?" she asked.

"I knew you'd be a sport," cried Dirk, relieved. "Why, the fellows are all in there. I bring you in as a captive, see? And they all set upon us, but my tribe—we're evenly divided—fights the hostile Indians, and so I get over to my wigwam. We've got it all made up; they tackle me when I go in. Then I leave you in the wigwam and we all fight; regular gym stunts. Bob Leonard's to be umpire and see it's all on the level. My side has to win, 'cause if it doesn't, why, the other side gets the captive, see? We'll have to try, all right; we're divided as fair as we could make it."

"What happens if the other side gets the captive—or if your side keeps her?" asked Beth with pardonable anxiety.

"Why, why—I don't know! We keep her, or we don't; that's about all; win the fight, don't you see?"

After that—well, after that I guess we cool off and have the eats,” Dirk explained.

Beth laughed. “Sounds like ‘the king of France went up the hill with twenty thousand men.’ I guess I needn’t mind playing that,” she said.

“Come on, then; they’re all waiting,” Dirk urged her. “I have to skulk up to the gym door and open it as quiet! Bring my captive in on the sly, see? They’ll all yell like sixty when they see us, so be ready.”

They did yell like sixty! Beth thought they yelled like ten times sixty. In spite of her preparation for the onslaught she shrank back as the horrid din smote her. Then she fulfilled her promise to play the best she could and resumed her haughty bearing, the scornful, unmoved pride of a noble white lady in the hands of savages, whose only weapon against them was her contempt for the worst that they could do.

No one could distinguish friendly Indians from the foes of her captor, for they were all in war paint and feathers, all brandishing tomahawks and yelling insanely, and they all fell on one another in a khaki-colored snarl of contest.

Gradually the snarl divided to Beth’s eyes and by degrees half fell back and allowed the other half, with Dirk at their head, dragging Beth by the wrists, to progress to the further end of the great room.

“Say, don’t come along so easy; you ought to hold back,” Dirk whispered to her.

“No, I ought not,” Beth retorted. “If I couldn’t get away and knew it, I’d come along quietly, to trick

you. Hannah Dustin kept still till she got her chance, then she killed the Indians and escaped. That's exactly the way I'm acting my part."

Dirk was silenced. When Beth came down on him with an historical fact he wilted—and Beth had an inconvenient number of historical facts at her tongue's end.

When Dirk, as chief, deposited his captive on a chair at the extreme end of the gymnasium, called, for convenience, his wigwam, he went on the war path again, and this time the fight was unimpeded by a captive and was waged thoroughly.

Though she knew that Mr. Leonard would not let the boys get carried away by the game, Beth's heart beat hard with excitement. After a while Beth saw that the fight followed rules and that Dirk's side was, on the whole, getting the best of it. Certain strokes counted as wounds, others were reckoned fatal and on receiving these the brave thus hit dropped out and was dragged aside. It was more interesting than Beth had expected to find it, though as little like a Twelfth Night revel as it well could be.

When Dirk's side was reduced to three spirited braves, yelling defiance to foes now outnumbering them by more than twice their number, Dirk turned to his tribe, crying:

"Shall we fight till we kill them all? The pale-faces will say the red man never shows mercy. Let's capture them and torture them and make them work for us, but let them keep their scalps. Saying this the

Big Chief Ride-on-the-Wind sprang to the top of the highest pine tree to overlook the field of battle."

With which speech, modeled on his best Indian stories, Dirk made a standing jump and rapidly swung himself to the top of the highest trapeze in the gymnasium.

"And the band played 'From the land of the sky blue water they brought a captive maid!'" cried Mr. Leonard applauding his pupil's feat.

Beth applauded, too, enjoying this part of the game immensely, when a sharp rending sound penetrated the laughter and she saw Mr. Leonard's face turn ghastly white as he paused with his upraised hands arrested in applause. It was but an instant, too brief to measure, the space of an indrawn breath, and one side of the lofty trapeze parted, the horizontal bar swung down on one end, swaying and twisting violently, and Dirk plunged head downward, clutching at the bar, missing it, falling headlong.

As death seemed to grip Beth's heart in the horrible silence of that instant, Mr. Leonard leaped forward, caught Dirk with his hands and shoulders, sank beneath the boy's weight, and received his fall, his body a cushion for the impact which he had broken as he clutched Dirk.

Another instant, and no one spoke or moved, then the boys rushed forward, shutting the group on the floor from Beth's eyes. She arose and tried to go toward them, but could not take a step. Then a great shout rang out and the boys pulled Dirk to his feet and

Mr. Leonard got up, dusting himself, trying to laugh, but making a sorry failure of it with his lips blue and drawn, his whole body visibly trembling.

"No harm done, Captive Maid!" Mr. Leonard called to poor little quivering Beth as she stood clinging to her chair, looking out over the boys' heads with big eyes staring from a white, pinched face.

Dirk went over to her. "Scared, Bethie? Pretty close call. What do you think of Bob Leonard now? Not a bump on me. I guess—I guess mother——" Dirk stopped short. To his disgust he was crying, "in front of the fellows!"

But no one seemed to mind. Not an Indian, foe or friendly, but that was choking tearfully, so no one could criticize Dirk for being shaken when he had so narrowly escaped death.

"Dirk, oh, Dirk, I was so frightened!" sobbed Beth. She longed to put her arms around her cousin and cry herself quiet, holding him to make sure she actually had him still, but she knew that Dirk would never allow such a display of emotion before an audience.

Beth looked at Mr. Leonard. It seemed to her that he loomed tall and marvelous and that she could see glory all around him.

"You saved Dirk's life. What do you suppose Uncle Jim and Aunt Alida will say?" she said, choking back the sob that tried to end her sentence.

"Don't you think they'll overlook it?" Mr. Leonard managed to laugh this time. "I merely jumped and caught Dirk. Didn't I play first base on the college

team? I've caught harder and smaller balls than that. You'd have jumped, too, Bethie; don't make so much of what I did. It was a good thing I was here, that's all. What I'd like to know is what made that trapeze give way. It's the best apparatus on the market. Indeed I don't mean to make light of what has happened. Dirk had a frightful fall. I am deeply thankful, deeply thankful that I could catch him. Good old chap!"

He put his arm over Dirk's shoulder with his fine young face full of affection. Dirk looked up at him adoringly. "I tell you what, Bob Leonard," he said, "I'd just as lief have you save my life as any one."

Then, in the nick of time to break up a nervous strain that threatened to be too much for a boys' frolic, what Dirk had called "the eats" appeared. There were sandwiches and hot chocolate, cakes of many sorts and ice-cream in forms, each form an Indian, except one, and that was a lovely maiden in bisque and strawberry so disposed that one could easily imagine that it represented pink and white youthful prettiness.

"Say, isn't my mother just one! Goes and orders Indians for us and never lets on, because I told her what we were going to play to-day!" cried Dirk.

"Here, this girl's for you, Beth, and the rest don't matter. The chocolate Indians are the nearest the real thing in looks." Dirk passed the cream as he talked and urged his friends to help themselves freely to the cakes, which, to do them justice, they were perfectly ready to do.

Beth could hardly eat; she chipped off the ends of her maiden's hair and nibbled a cake, but she still saw Dirk's body dashing through the air and her head swam. She wondered at the boys who, without exception, though some of them began to eat slowly, all rose superior to nerves and tucked away Mrs. Cortlandt's refreshments rapidly. Even Mr. Leonard, who was a boy, too, of a larger size, proved as equal to this occasion as he had been to the danger.

After the refreshments there never seems to be much for which to linger and Dirk's Twelfth Night party broke up shortly. When the eating was over the sense of solemnity returned and the boys were ill at ease. Dirk was evidently glad when the last one had departed and he could go to his room to resume the garments of the white race.

That evening at dinner Dirk was a hero. Natalie and Alys hung upon his every word. Natalie visibly glowed when he ate with hearty relish, apparently relieved by proof that he was thoroughly and boyishly alive.

Alys smiled at every word Dirk spoke; she spoke to him softly, with the greatest affection, as though she feared to startle him if she used her ordinary tone. She told him that if he still wanted the camera which he thought better than his own, he might have it. She added that she was sorry she had not given it to him at once.

Dirk grinned at this and openly winked at Beth, calling upon her to share his glee over Alys's conversion to him.

But Beth's smile in return was full of unmixed joy ; she did not think it was funny that Alys discovered that her one brother was a precious possession, after all.

Mr. Cortlandt watched Dirk in a hidden way and his face was full of emotion. Aunt Alida toyed with her dinner and did not try to hide the tears that choked her. No one could forget what a different household theirs might have been that night but for Bob Leonard's quickness of mind and hand.

After dinner Beth saw her aunt fold Dirk in her arms and hold him close while the lad dropped his head on her breast like a little child.

"My son, my one little, little son !" murmured Aunt Alida. "If I had lost you I could not have lived !"

"I know it, mummy. I was glad right away Bob Leonard caught me, for your sake," returned Dirk. "I'd have hated like everything to have had you come home if—if he hadn't."

Beth heard with surprise. She had fancied that Aunt Alida loved her girls better, if there were a difference, than she loved her boy. She treated Dirk with a playful carelessness and he rarely showed feeling when he was with her, whereas the girls openly worshiped her beauty and her charm.

Evidently this son and mother understood each other without demonstrations. Beth wondered, feeling that she was learning a great deal. She went to bed a tired little girl, worn out by excitement and emotion. Her last thought on the borderland of sleep was a grateful one that all her dear people were happy that night.

CHAPTER XV

CHRYSLIS AND THE COUNTESS

BETH had a slight cold so could not go out. Her birthday was Valentine's Day and her cousins hinted at some delightfully mysterious way in which it was to be celebrated and for which she must be perfectly well, so Beth was nursing her cold in the house, St. Valentine's feast—and hers—being but a week distant.

Liebchen and Annunciata had been sent for to spend the afternoon. Both these children regarded Beth as a sort of distinct order of being, compounded of equal parts of a good fairy, a dear little girl, an almost-big girl—for they were both younger than Beth—a grand lady to admire, a warm-hearted friend to love, and they proceeded to love her in the combined ways and to the degree all these sides demanded.

When there was a chance amid her whirl of pleasures, Beth was allowed to ask her worshipers to visit her. They had come to-day and Beth was romping with them as she never could romp with Natalie and Alys. When they went home there would be gifts for them, pretty ribbons, some candy, a toy or two and perhaps a simple, pretty little frock. The consciousness of this possibility, based on past experiences, added no little to

Liebchen's and Annunciata's enjoyment of the frolic while they were with Beth.

Dirk had joined Beth and her guests and Beth had suggested and directed a new play. Liebchen and Annunciata did not understand it, but it necessitated dressing up so it did not matter why they had to do this always agreeable thing. Dirk did not enter far into Beth's enthusiasm for the game, but, as he said, he "made a stagger at playing it," and Beth's imagination did not need much fuel to feed its flames.

"I shall be Mary, Queen of Scots," she elucidated. "You will be the faithful Douglas, Dirk, who adores her and tries to make her life in prison less miserable. Liebchen and Annunciata must be the four Maries—I mean two of the queen's Maries. They were her ladies in waiting, you know."

"Switched if I do!" declared Dirk. "Where do you get all this stuff, Beth? History?"

"Well, not plain history," admitted Beth. "I just love the Border Ballads and all those things. And 'The Abbot,' you know, one of the Waverley novels, is all about Queen Mary; I've read it and read it! I play I'm Mary Queen of Scots half the time at home. Janie can't stand the Waverley novels; I looked over some I don't care about, either. But 'The Abbot' and 'Kenilworth' and 'Ivanhoe' and 'The Talisman'—goodness, Dirk, I should think you'd love them! I like 'Guy Mannering,' too. Janie plays I'm Mary Stuart at Lochleven Castle pretty nicely, though. I've just *made* her listen to the best parts of 'The Abbot,' so she

could. She has to be Catharine Seyton, of course. When she puts her arm through the bolt place to fasten the door—oh! Well, we must play now. I'll tell you what to say and do. You don't have to dress up much ——”

“I'm not going to dress up at all.” Dirk decided that at once.

“I suppose your suit would answer,” said Beth doubtfully; she recognized Dirk's determination and that she should lose his support unless she compromised. “Knickerbockers and a jacket are something like trunks and a doublet. All right; you stay as you are. But Liebchen and Annunciata must have long trained skirts and head-dresses and some jewels; not many, because the queen could not give them much when she was in misfortune. You wait here, Dirk, and I'll take them to my room to fix up. Aunt Alida gave me perfectly magnificent robes of state to dress up in, old silk dresses of hers. We'll be back soon.”

Beth hurried her two attendants away before her and presently they all returned, splendid to behold in their finery.

Liebchen wore a blue moiré silk skirt that not merely trailed behind her, but was so long in front that it had to be looped up through a girdle around her hips, and this gave her quite the effect of a lady of the period which she represented. Annunciata wore a yellow gown, equally too long for her, equally puffy around her hips. Both had head-dresses with feathers and jewels, both were decked with chains and each carried

a fan—merely as a touch of vague elegance. Beth, as the hapless queen, wore a royal robe of purple velvet and a cap of lavender with a long white veil flowing down her shoulders. Her head-dress came down in a point in the middle of her forehead so that there, at least, she looked like the portraits of Mary Stuart and a clever person might guess whom she represented.

“Gracious! You do look like I don’t know what!” exclaimed Dirk candidly. “I don’t blame whoever it was that did it for putting you into prison, if there wasn’t any asylum those days! Now what do you do—what’s the game, after you get togged out?”

Beth looked a little troubled; Dirk had laid his finger on the weak spot in these imaginative plays of hers. Nothing actual ever came of the dressing up; it all depended on how much the players could get out of feeling their parts.

“Why, I don’t know,” she said slowly. “I think the captive queen had better walk about her prison, under the guard of George Douglas—that’s you. We can go through the house—nobody’s around—and pretend it’s Lochleven Castle. My ladies in waiting will walk behind me and sometimes I shall invite one or the other to take her place at my side. We’ll come back up-stairs afterward and they will sing, I guess. The queen’s ladies sang a good deal while she embroidered, or wrote Latin prayers, or French poetry.”

“Well, if that isn’t a lively game!” cried Dirk with a shout of laughter. “The queen must have had some head if she could write prayers and poetry in two lan-

guages with people singing around her. If a bunch of girls sang I think I see what my Latin and French exercises would look like! Well, come on, if you're going to promenade! Come on; queen's move! Bob Leonard's been teaching me chess."

Beth preceded down the hall, her step stately, her carriage aimed to convey dignity, resignation and suffering. She felt that she actually was the imprisoned queen and her eyes glowed with inward light as she dwelt upon her misfortunes, a royal prisoner in this lonely northern island castle, with hope fading day by day. She managed to overlook the awkwardness of her ladies in their looped up gowns, even the school-boy suit of "George Douglas," which distressed her till she forcibly banished it from her mind.

The funny little cavalcade proceeded down to the lower hall and lifted the curtain of the library door. Here the queen felt that she should find the setting most like the dark castle of her imagination. "George Douglas" held the leather curtain back for her and her attendants to pass through.

To the children's horror there sat at the further end of the room, facing the door beside a tea wagon and a small table with an alcohol kettle boiling upon it, Aunt Alida and a lady whom Beth and Dirk thought they had never seen before. This lady laughed at the apparition in the doorway and Aunt Alida smiled reassuringly to Beth.

"No harm done, Beth dear. Come in, please. Evidently you did not know I was at home. Come and

show us your costumes. To whom have I the honor of speaking? I see it is not Beth Bristead," said Aunt Alida, holding out an inviting hand.

Beth came forward shyly, but smiling as she saw sympathy and understanding in the stranger's beautiful blue eyes. She was not precisely pretty; beside Aunt Alida's brilliant beauty she looked almost plain. But her eyes were lovely, her bearing graceful and refined. Beth decided on the spot that she was "nice," and that she need not mind being seen by this unknown lady in her costume.

"We were playing that I was Mary, Queen of Scots, Aunt Alida," said Beth. "Liebchen and Annunciata are ladies in waiting. Dirk is George Douglas, only he wouldn't dress up. Out of 'The Abbot,' you know."

"Oh, really!" exclaimed Aunt Alida's guest with an accent so unmistakably English that Beth recognized it. "How delightful to find children enjoying Sir Walter Scott! My little girl and boys won't read an older classic than Kipling and Barrie. Will you present me to her majesty, Mrs. Cortlandt, please?"

"In real life this is my husband's niece, Elizabeth Bristead, my only son, Dirk, and two protégées of Beth's. But now—Lady Harrowdene, I present you to her majesty, the Queen of Scotland. Queen Mary, graciously receive Lady Caroline Patricia, Countess of Harrowdene." Aunt Alida arose to make the presentation and her guest also arose, making the profound courtesy required in a court presentation, her eyes

laughing into Beth's with a look half maternal, half a playmate's.

Beth caught her breath, her eyes widened in terror; she glanced at Aunt Alida to discover whether this introduction was part of a play, too. She remembered that Frieda had said that titled ladies came from across the sea in winter and were entertained by her aunt and uncle, and Aunt Alida did not seem to her to be making believe that her guest was a noble lady. But it seemed quite impossible to Beth that a countess should be present in the flesh, outside the pages of romance.

Lady Harrowdene bent her head respectfully and said: "Your majesty, I rejoice to see that you are bearing so well the weary months and years of your captivity. Though I am English, I am heart and soul your slave, in spite of the circumstances which force me to live in the land reigned over by Elizabeth."

"Why don't you say something?" Dirk whispered with a vigorous nudge. He had great pride in Beth's flow of antique-sounding phrases which she usually employed in making believe.

"Are you really a—a countess?" Beth asked, staring wide-eyed at Lady Harrowdene when she was thus goaded to speak.

Lady Harrowdene laughed delightedly. "You funny little thing!" she cried. "Is that what is the trouble? Shall we stop playing Queen Mary and her attendants and talk in our proper persons? Thank you; making believe is a bit hard to keep up long. I think my title is all right. Why do you question it? My husband

is Lord William Bellair, Earl of Harrowdene. Doesn't that make me a countess, quite securely?"

"Yes, ma'am. Yes, my lady. I don't know even how to say yes to a countess! I didn't really believe there were countesses and earls, not *feel* I believed them, till this minute!" cried Beth in a burst of a sort of despair of meeting this occasion properly.

Lady Harrowdene laughed so heartily that the tears sprang to her eyes.

"Why do you care so much about them, my dear? Aren't you a true little American republican, believing—what is it that your Declaration of Independence says? That all men are created equal? Why, then, do you care about a title?" cried this merry countess when she recovered her breath.

"It's not that," Beth tried bravely to explain. "It's not the way the Declaration meant, I care. It's—it's so strange, because you read about earls and countesses in books and they always seem so—interesting. Almost like fairies, only nicer, I think. And it doesn't seem as though they could be just going around now. Are your children earls and countesses?"

"My oldest boy will be Harrowdene some day. My girl—she's not as old as you are—is the Honorable Constantia Bellair, because her father is an earl. We call her Con, Connie, usually, quite as you are called Beth. It really doesn't matter about these things as much as you fancy, my dear. I see, though, that it is the romance of it that appeals to you, not the worldly side of noble birth. But I assure you we are not par-

ticularly romantic, though I fancy you'd find plenty to enthrall your dreaming little soul in the fine old Elizabethan house at Harrowdene. One day you must see it, when your aunt comes over to return my visit of to-day and brings your lovely cousins, as she has promised to do. They used to call me Honorable Pat, Beth, before I was married, because my father was also an earl. Now they call me Lady Pat, and my husband makes stupid jokes on my name, all about his Pat-ent wife; what a frightful wound he got when my father gave him a Pat—and all that sort of thing, don't you know? But this is when we are quite in private and it doesn't matter! I only mention it to show you that an earl is quite merely a mere man! By the way, my dear, an ancestor of mine, on my mother's side, was one of the noblemen selected to witness the execution of poor Mary Stuart. Pray don't set that down against me; I'm sure I should have tried to rescue her had I been in his place!"

Lady Harrowdene had talked on, evidently to set Beth at her ease, and to accustom her to the shock of meeting English historical romances clothed in flesh, which she saw was much the way in which Beth regarded her.

The little girl had listened, enthralled. Lady Harrowdene's beautiful voice, her inflections, so different from those she had always heard, made of the tongue they both spoke something so unlike its old self, so attractively unlike it, that Beth could have listened forever, even had not what Lady Harrowdene said been so interesting.

"Don't be too disappointed, dear, that I am just an every-day twentieth century woman and not a splendid creature of Queen Elizabeth's court!" Lady Patricia leaned toward Beth with the motherly look in her eyes, and Beth went over to her at once.

"The daughter of a thousand earls, belted earls!" she murmured.

Aunt Alida and Lady Patricia dissolved in merriment at this, and Lady Patricia hugged Beth vehemently.

"You dear, funny little creature!" she cried. "I give you my word that I never had a thousand earls for a father in my life! And I'm quite sure my father never wore a belt, except when he was playing tennis. If it gives you satisfaction to think of me as a countess, pray keep it well in mind. But if it is going to raise a barrier against our intimacy, then please consider me only as the mother of five little English people, Herbert, Richard, Constantia, Gilbert, and my rosy, jolly baby James William. I had to keep up the family names and poor Jamie took both his grandfather's and his father's! You would love Jamie, Beth. He is nearly two years old. While I am away from him he tugs at my heart-strings like a particularly strong Atlantic cable. Dirk, dear, Beth and I are doing all the talking! You were but a little lad when I was last over; I remember you, but you will not remember me."

"Yes, I do now, Lady Harrowdene," said Dirk. "You had the greatest little terrier I ever saw."

"I had, truly," said Lady Harrowdene, greatly pleased. "He's still the greatest little dog in England."

The children will not allow him to leave them ; he's waiting my return with the rest of my family. You are all going to see him when you go over. He will do tricks for you, fall over dead, stand erect and salute at 'God save the king,' join in the chorus with barks when he's bidden—he has really quite a repertory of accomplishments ! I shall be glad to introduce you to Briton when you come to visit me, and that must not be later than the summer after next. Now then, Alida, are you ever going to tell them ? If you don't I shall."

"Do you think it's fair to blame me for delay, Pat, dear ? There has been no lull in the conversation !" returned Aunt Alida.

Beth noticed with surprise this intimate use of first names ; she wondered when Aunt Alida had come to know so well this lady, separated from her by the width of the Atlantic.

"Beth, you are to be given a birthday party ! It must also be a Valentine party, as you are a Valentine child. I had planned to celebrate you, but Lady Harrowdene has a Valentine-birthday idea that puts mine quite in the shade ! It will —— Oh, Lady Pat, I believe I will not tell her about it, after all ! It is a week distant. We'll let Beth get gray and ugly puzzling over it ; we won't tell her another syllable than that she is to have a party !" Aunt Alida stopped herself short and laughed at Beth with her flashing dark eyes.

Beth did not grow gray, nor did she seem to those that loved her in the least likelihood of becoming ugly

as the week before her birthday crawled past. But she gave a great deal of thought to the celebration of the day. So did Natalie and Alys; Dirk professed indifference to all parties, but secretly he speculated, too, on what new form this celebration could take. Mrs. Cortlandt would not give either of her own children the least hint about it, for fear Beth should hear it; they all rightly thought that Mrs. Cortlandt was having a fine time keeping the mystery shrouded.

St. Valentine's day came at last. Early in the afternoon Frieda attired Beth in the strangest costume! Beth did not know whether to like it or not; she certainly had the gravest doubt of its suitability. Yet Aunt Alida always knew, not merely what was pretty, but what was appropriate. This gown was blue, light blue in its upper part, dark blue below, and it had velvet stripes of yellow bordering its tunic and rings of yellow velvet on the skirt. The material was the gauziest silk imaginable; everything about the frock was exquisite, but the effect altogether was, as Beth doubtfully told herself, "queer." However, she could not voice her doubt and in a moment Frieda had slipped over the whole costume a straight, sheathing sort of a dull yellow silken garment, like a scant rain-coat. It had a yellow silk hood which Frieda drew forward over Beth's hair, carefully arranging it so that the whalebones in it lay so that they would keep the hood from disarranging her hair.

"For pity's sake, Frieda, what is it? It makes me

look like a big chrysalis!" cried Beth, surveying her sleek gray figure in the glass with disfavor.

Frieda clapped her hands. "Isn't that fine, Miss Beth!" she cried. "Just what it's meant to look like! And to think you knew it at once!"

"Well, my goodness! I don't want to be a chrysalis!" cried Beth. Then she remembered and felt ashamed. "But Aunt Alida knows," she added loyally. "Anyhow, I should think she'd made you look nice often enough, Beth Bristead, for you to wear what she wanted you to! Maybe Aunt Alida wants me to be a chrysalis to eat salad! Am I ready, Frieda?"

"Yes, Miss Beth, you are. I'm to go with you to help you and your cousins," said Frieda, making sure that her black gown and white linen cap and apron were as they should be.

"Going with us? Are we going somewhere, Frieda?" cried Beth.

But Frieda put her finger on her lip and shook her head to say that she must not tell Beth anything, even at this late hour, and, taking her coat, Frieda led the way to the elevator and put Beth in.

Down-stairs Beth found three other figures swathed like herself in scant dull yellow silk—Natalie, Alys and Dirk. She stared, then began to take a more hopeful view of the queer costume. If there were so many copies of it they must have some fine purpose.

"All ready?" asked Aunt Alida, hastening out from the reception room where she had waited for her flock.

Beth saw that she was clad in beauty unconcealed, so the cocoon-like sheath was not for her.

"Léon is at the door, children!" cried Aunt Alida, as always, refreshingly excited and happy in the prospect of pleasure for the children.

She led the way to the car, put the three girls in the back seat, took Dirk with her in the middle seats, Frieda took her place beside Léon and they were off.

They drove circuitously, from street to street, from Fifth Avenue to Madison Avenue, in the blocks which lay between, and everywhere they were joined by other cars, each containing one or more of the mysterious silk-clad figures, wearing exactly the same long, dull silk enveloping coats which Beth and her cousins wore. These cars fell in line with the Cortlandt car till they had a lengthy procession of various cars, all carrying human chrysalides. Everybody they passed stared, but that did not matter. Most people smiled at the procession, recognizing it as a children's party of some sort.

The line of motors stopped in turn under the porte-cochère of one of the most splendid hotels in the city and each discharged its burden of guests and maids. The party was met by a preternaturally tall person in quiet livery who said:

"Lady Harrowdene's party? Thank you, madam. This way if you please," and conducted Mrs. Cortlandt and all her dull silken followers to elevators which took them up to the second floor, where they were led by the tall man who looked, Natalie whispered, "like

the Washington monument," to a room opening out of a ballroom in which the children heard violins tuning.

"Her ladyship is here, Mrs. Cortlandt," said the tall man throwing open the door. Then he bowed low and withdrew.

Lady Harrowdene came rapidly forward to meet them. "So glad you are come at last!" she said. "Oh, no, you are not late, Alida, but I was a bit early and waiting was tedious. How beautifully you have carried out the idea! Aren't they charming, the chrysalis-girls? Please present me to my—and your—guests."

One by one Mrs. Cortlandt introduced the young people, girls and boys, to Lady Harrowdene. Beth thus knew for the first time who were invited to her birthday party; she found that they were the Tanagers and Bluebirds and the other young people whom she had met, her cousins' friends. This did not lessen her shyness. Beth had never made the least progress in acquaintanceship outside her family that winter, and now the fear of what might be required of her at a party given in her honor oppressed her.

Aunt Alida must have known this for she announced:

"This is Beth's party, but she is as much in the dark in regard to it as any of you. Lady Harrowdene has surprises for you all, so you are to consider her as your hostess and Beth as a sort of Appendix Hostess. We are all under Lady Harrowdene's orders."

"Very well, then," began Lady Harrowdene, accept-

ing her responsibility; "you must know that you are each to consider yourself a chrysalis, if you please! You did not know why you were bidden wear that yellow silk covering, but this is the reason: you are each a chrysalis. Now, we are to repair to the dancing room, each chrysalis when it—'it' is surely the correct word for a chrysalis!—when it is ready."

She led the way, a dazzling apparition in white and green. Beth saw with unspeakable joy that she wore on her hair something that must have been a coronet! What rapture it gave her to know that her hostess, Beth Bristead's hostess at her birthday party, rightfully wore a countess's coronet!

" 'Kind hearts are more than coronets
And simple faith than Norman blood,' "

she said to her own great dismay, and not because that was what she was thinking, but because Lady Harrowdene's coronet put the words on her tongue. She was horrified when a girl at her elbow heard her quotation and laughed.

The ballroom was beautiful with flowers, the orchestra was playing irresistible dance music as the chrysalides slid, in their quiet dull color, into the brilliant light. The daylight was excluded by heavy screens and the electric candles turned the February afternoon into night.

In a moment every chrysalis was dancing and they danced for an hour. Then the music died away into

the faintest echo and the chrysalides stopped dancing, wondering what was to happen.

A curtain concealing a stage at the end of the long room was withdrawn by invisible hands and upon this stage flitted fairy figures, so beautiful, so fairylike, as they half danced, half flew on the invisible wires across the stage, that Beth caught her breath in delight, so keen that it overwhelmed her.

The fairies—in reality they were professional dancers hired by Lady Harrowdene—began a dance that seemed to call upon nature to awaken; it was a Dance of Spring. With exquisite threadings of wind-blown mazes they flitted, calling, hand to lips. Then they poised, listening, one hand on hip, one at the ear, as the dancers leaned forward to hear if their summons were heeded. Then they bent their graceful bodies low to earth, lightly touching the ground. Then they sprang up with fawn-like leaps, triumphing, the flowers which they had wakened and culled waving in their hands above their heads. And finally they came to the front of the stage, lips parted as if calling, waving their arms, extending their hands, fluttering, waiting expectant, never still, yet waiting.

Natalie had been coached by Lady Harrowdene what to do. She stood at the head of a long double row of chrysalides. At a signal from her each chrysalis fell off and the boys and girls appeared in gorgeous colors. At last Beth understood her gown of blues with the yellow velvet stripes! She was a butterfly, they were each a butterfly, broken out of a chrysalis,

Natalie in gold, Alys in green, Dirk in browns and golds, all the young guests in color combinations incredibly beautiful.

Natalie began to swing in time with the slow dancing on the stage; the entire line of newly-emerged butterflies swung with her and followed her as she broke into a dance. She led them around the room, dancing as only Natalie could dance, improvising her steps and motions. The professional dancers came down and danced with the children till, finally, the line broke up into pairs and, all over the room, the butterflies were waltzing, a sight so beautiful that, as Mrs. Cortlandt said, it was the greatest pity that all the world could not be there to see.

Then, as if Lady Harrowdene were in command of genii, the servants of the hotel slipped into the room and began to serve refreshments. Aunt Alida had attended to the selection of these, as more versed in what these American birthday guests would prefer than Lady Harrowdene was.

All the edibles were valentines! Heart-shaped sandwiches, as well as cakes; salads served in lacy paper, like old-fashioned valentines; patés also lace-trimmed and heart-decorated; fancy ices in valentine forms; sweets in pairs of love birds; chocolate in heart cups, its whipped cream carrying out the old-fashioned valentine effect of lace paper.

Somehow Beth found herself at the head of the central one of the small tables which Lady Harrowdene's genii had swiftly and noiselessly set in place and

covered with good things. To her table they bore a huge valentine cake, decorated with all sorts of icing designs in the valentine style, ringed around with eleven candles burning steadily. Beth had to rise and cut the cake. She was so embarrassed that she could only make the first incision, from which custom forbade her being excused. Aunt Alida rescued her after that and cut the birthday cake into slices herself.

"You are to sit still, Beth, please," Lady Harrowdene said, signaling to the servants when the supper was over.

Just as swiftly and silently as they had brought them, the men bore the tables away, all but the centre one on which Beth's birthday cake stood and at which Beth herself was left, a solitary island entirely surrounded by guests and shyness.

The orchestra, which had been playing beautiful soft music during the supper, played a waltz. The butterflies once more spread their wings, figuratively speaking, and danced. As they whirled around and past Beth each butterfly dropped into the lap of this one little motionless butterfly a package, tied with gay ribbons, decked with birthday cards and flowers, till the small table was heaped and the small recipient was nearly overcome.

" 'Please don't open till Christmas,' not till you get home at any rate!" cried Alys. "Come and dance, Bethie, for it will soon be over and this music is heavenly."

It was; Beth thought so. Aunt Rebecca would

have been surprised if she could have seen her little grandniece dancing, for Beth had acquired the accomplishment only this winter and was fond of it with all her musical heart.

"The clock strikes twelve, Cinderella!" warned Lady Harrowdene. "Dear guests, my party is over. I'm sorry and I hope you are."

"It was the nicest party we ever had, Lady Harrowdene," declared one of the Tanager girls. "If you have parties like this in England I'm going to live there as soon as I come of age."

Beth came home excited, tired, but in a dream of bliss. The party had seemed like a dream, but the proof of its reality was the snow of white packages completely covering the floor of the tonneau of the car.

"Well, sir," exclaimed Dirk, speaking out of a long silence on the way home, "she's a countess that counts!"

And Natalie, Alys and Beth enthusiastically agreed.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SHROVE NIGHT MASQUE

“**S**HALL you be ready to meet Shakespeare when he comes here on Tuesday night, Beth?” asked Mr. Cortlandt unexpectedly, emerging from behind his morning paper. “It is the custom of some people to ‘get up’ handy quotations from an author before meeting him, to have them ready to use; it’s supposed to please him, but all real authors hate it. If you like I’ll rehearse the balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet* and we’ll act it for Mr. Shakespeare when he comes.”

Beth smiled in a puzzled way, looking inquiringly at her uncle. She knew there was some clue to the meaning of his nonsense, but she lacked it.

“I saw an allusion to our ball in the paper, that’s what reminded me,” Mr. Cortlandt went on. “You look blank, Beth. Is it possible you haven’t heard of the ball?”

“Mama has been so busy about it we haven’t seen her much lately, and Natalie and I never thought to tell Beth, because we’re not in it anyway, so it doesn’t matter,” said Alys.

“Oh, dear me, it matters a lot!” exclaimed her father. “Where’s your family pride, my dear? The

Cortlandt ball is going down in the history of New York! And I'm not sure you mayn't see it. I think I'll put in a plea to the hostess to make an exception to the rule and let you young people sit up that night to see the pageant. It will be worth looking at and one night won't ruin your budding beauty! I should like to have Beth see it. We'll hide you in the gallery, but we'll costume you first, so if you are discovered you'll be in the picture."

"What is it, Uncle Jim?" asked Beth, as Natalie and Alys clapped their hands and softly cheered this decision.

"Fancy one's own niece not knowing what I'm talking about when the daily papers are eagerly discussing 'Mr. and Mrs. James Cortlandt's Elizabethan ball!'" cried Uncle Jim. "That's what it is, Bethie—an Elizabethan Ball. It is to be a masked ball of the period when Bess of England reigned, and Will Shakespeare was writing and acting at the Globe Theatre in London, and Sir Walter Raleigh was spreading his cloak for the queen to pass over the mud dry shod while, at the same time, he was trying to spread her realm over the sea into our own Virginia. There's a royal prince visiting the United States just now, little niece, whom your aunt and I have met several times; we are giving the ball in his honor. It will be rather magnificent, we hope. It is to be a Shrovetide Masque—now doesn't that sound Elizabethan? Next Tuesday is the day—Shrove Tuesday. There will be court dancing, gavottes, minuets, those formal old dances which so well

suit the brocades and farthingales of that period, and there'll be a play acted without scenery, right on the ballroom floor among the guests, just as plays were given in Shakespeare's day. At midnight we unmask and sup, and end with modern dancing. You children shall see it; I want you to."

Beth listened, bewildered, to this amazing explanation in which a real, live Royal Prince was mingled with ghosts of historical splendor.

"Do you think Aunt Alida will care?" she gasped, hardly knowing what she said.

"If you sit up to see the ball? Not she, not after a moment. She'll never be hard-hearted enough to deny us," declared Uncle Jim, identifying his desire with Beth's in the most satisfactory way.

Aunt Alida did demur for just about the moment which Uncle Jim had allowed for her to hesitate, when he announced his decision to have the children see the ball which all New York was discussing. But she yielded her objections to breaking through her rule of "early to bed and early to rise" for her young folk, and consented to let them be hidden in the gallery at the end of the great ballroom to see the spectacle which would be a lifelong memory of beauty to them.

This meant hurriedly planned costumes for the four. The ball guests would be sure to invade the ballroom galleries and Aunt Alida did not intend to allow the smallest blemish in the harmony of this great ball. When the children were discovered, as they would be, looking on, they must be found in the costume of the

period of the ball, not in their own twentieth century persons and frocks.

Poor Aunt Alida was dismayed at this additional task unexpectedly fallen upon her, but Miss Deland came to her rescue.

"Let me attend to the costumes, dear Mrs. Cortlandt," she said. "I'm sure I can design them well enough—to be hidden away!"

Mrs. Cortlandt laughed, looking relieved. "You could choose costumes quite pretty enough to put in the middle of the strongest limelight, Miss Deland," she said. "Lessons have been so neglected this winter by our gadabout Beth that you hardly have had her in the schoolroom enough to know what she looks like! But you can guess what will be becoming to her!"

"I know Bethie's sunny face better than you think I do, and I know how well she loves English history," said Miss Deland with a smile for Beth that made Beth throw her arms around this lovable teacher and give her one of her impetuous hugs.

"Miss Deland and I are very well acquainted, because I love her dearly, Aunt Alida," she said. "And she teaches me a great deal in a few days. I've learned different things from the ones I learn in school at home, but Miss Deland makes me know so much in an hour that you needn't think I've lost this winter—studying, I mean."

"To be truthful, I'm not seriously worried about it, Bethie," laughed Aunt Alida. "And it surely ought to be a good way to become well acquainted with a

person to love her dearly ! Then I'll leave it to you, Miss Deland, to turn the quartette into subjects of Queen Elizabeth, and you really don't know how much I appreciate your undertaking it for me."

"We must have a solemn consultation, girls and boy !" said Miss Deland, as Aunt Alida hurried away. "Your gowns must be simple. We can have them made at home. We'll get a sempstress in and call upon Anna Mary and Frieda to help ; I can sew, too."

"If only we could get Miss Tappan ! She's the dressmaker at home," said Beth. "She's really quick, though she looks like some one who would be dreadfully slow. She goes out by the day ; she charges only a dollar a day to old customers, like Aunt Rebecca. She mightn't be able to make Elizabethan dresses, though." Beth looked doubtful and somewhat troubled.

"It doesn't matter, dear, does it ? As long as we can't get Miss Tappan," suggested Miss Deland. "The first thing is to decide on the colors for each of you and then to fly off to the shops to find materials suitable for our purpose."

"Please, Miss Deland, I think the very first thing of all is to decide what we are to be," said Beth decidedly.

"Oh, that's settled now," said Miss Deland. "You are to be young people of Queen Elizabeth's time, probably children of some of her courtiers. It won't be necessary to decide which ones ; you will be smuggled away in a corner of the gallery."

"Oh, indeed it is necessary !" implored Beth. "I want to know just exactly who I am, so I can be part

of it. You see, you can't half see a thing right if you are part of it and don't know what part it is. Mayn't we decide that first, Miss Deland ? ”

“ I'm sure I don't care what I am ; we're only going to look on,” said Alys, puzzled by Beth's absorbing interest in imaginative things, as she always was.

“ Well, I want to look on right,” persisted Beth.

“ I know ! You shall be Judith Shakespeare, Beth ! ” cried Miss Deland, with an inspiration. “ And Dirk shall be Hamnet, ‘ Will Shakespeare's little lad ! ’ Natalie shall be Susanna, Shakespeare's oldest child, while Alys—well, we will make Alys the Lady Alys Dudley, a relative of the Earl of Leicester, the favorite of the queen, and pretend she is entertaining Shakespeare's young folk during their visit to London. Will that please you, Beth dear ? ”

“ I'll love it,” declared Beth briefly, her face illumined. Miss Deland saw that in an instant she had assumed her rôle and was become the dutiful, proud daughter of the greatest of poets.

The mere detail of color and design for her costume Beth passed over lightly, without much interest in it. Not so Natalie and Alys ; even though they were to be concealed from sight they cared a great deal to have their costumes suit them.

Yellow for Alys, with her blonde hair ; blue for Beth and crimson for Natalie and wine-colored velvet for Dirk were settled upon. Miss Deland bore the girls off in the Cortlandt car to do the shopping this entailed.

For four days scissors, needles and sewing-machine

gleamed and buzzed. Miss Deland designed and cut out, Anna Mary and Frieda sewed and Frieda's mother was fetched in to help, a competent German woman whose needle worked fast and skilfully.

Not for nothing had Aunt Rebecca insisted upon Beth's daily "stint" of sewing, in the old-fashioned way, bringing up a girl early to use her needle well. Beth now came out strong in her hated accomplishment and helped effectually in the hurried work under way. Neither Natalie nor Alys could sew well enough to count in real work.

"It's a fine thing, so it is, to know how to sew, Miss Natalie," said Anna Mary, biting off her thread, though she would not permit one of the girls thus to risk breaking the enamel of a tooth. "Sure, if you know how it doesn't get in the way of buyin' your clothes, nor of hirin' some one else to sew for you. But when you lose your money, or happen to be where there's no buyin', nor hirin', it gets sore in your way not to know how to put a garmient together, nor the top from the bottom of an unmade sleeve, no, nor a hawk from handsewin', as the sayin' is."

" 'A hawk from a handsaw,' " murmured Miss Deland in spite of herself, much amused, yet knowing better than to attempt to correct Anna Mary. "That's Shakespeare, Anna Mary! You certainly sew wonderfully well and wonderfully fast! I don't know how we ever should have had the costumes done in time, but for you," she added hastily, seeing Anna Mary's brow darken.

"It would be a poor creature that was lady's maid as many years as I've been and couldn't sew, Miss Deland," said Anna Mary, mollified, but accepting the compliment as her just due.

When the costumes were finished they were so charming that Aunt Alida clapped her hands at the sight of the four figures arrayed in them, declaring that it was a pity to hide such effects in the gallery. They surprisingly brought out the characteristics of each wearer. Natalie looked quite grown up in her stiff gown, a magnificent court lady, so handsome that jealous Queen Elizabeth would never have suffered her at her court. Alys looked dignified and impressive, but Beth looked like what she was, a rosy cheeked little girl masquerading, and Dirk might well have passed for what he represented, the one little son whom Shakespeare loved and lost.

Shrove Tuesday night came, a warm night for the season. It would have been the children's privilege to have seen Mrs. Cortlandt dress, but Beth refused to go, wishing to keep the coming wonders of the night and the illusion of Elizabeth's court to burst upon her in undivided glory, its illusion perfect. She would not risk seeing one of the maskers transformed from Aunt Alida into an Elizabethan lady. Since Beth would not look at their mother till she appeared in the ballroom, the others would not either.

All four slipped down into the vast ballroom early. The room was groined and arched, with Corinthian columns supporting its galleries. It suggested a Greek

temple, but a temple devoted to the gods of youth and joy. Its white and gold was hung with countless lights, wreathed, grouped, scattered in curves and singly like electric blossoms in a hanging garden. No plants broke the white lines of the columns and arches, but garlands of unbelievable orchids fell carelessly from the balconies, and chains of Killarney roses and ferns stretched from point to point, filling the air with sweetness. The orchestra was placed behind the diaphanous golden screen built for it. It was a screen of white agate, cut into lace-like fragility in designs of ferns and blossoms, like point lace ; the light shone through the agate with a delicate warmth that made the flowers alive, as if they really were the white jasmine they represented, blooming in the moonlight. Framing the screen was a golden fantasy of musical instruments, wrought in metal.

“It looks the way music sounds !” cried Beth rapturously, seeing the golden screen with its agate carving for the first time illuminated.

At nine o'clock the orchestra began playing softly behind its screen. Presently a fanfare of trumpets sounded beyond the ballroom, the doors were thrown open, the orchestra burst into splendid music, which Beth did not know was one of the Liszt Hungarian rhapsodies, and a procession began to enter.

First came solemn men in a queer uniform, with staves ; these were not masked. They represented the beef-eaters, the yeomen of the Royal Guard, who attended upon the sovereign at state banquets.

“Those are just men, hired,” said Dirk, craning his

neck eagerly to see the pageant. "Jolly! If there isn't Tim marching in with them! Daddy got him in as a beef-eater! Wait till I get at him to-morrow!"

Next came Mr. Cortlandt, walking alone. He too, being the host, was unmasked.

"I never knew father was such a peach!" cried Alys, moved beyond herself by the spectacle of her father in white satin, embroidered in blues and golds, a blue velvet cloak swinging from one shoulder, a plumed hat carried jauntily under his left arm. Jewels blazed from his hands and throat, the clasp of his cloak, his knee and shoe buckles; the collar of an order hung around his neck and a blazing star of diamonds fell from it upon his chest.

"He's just as handsome as he can be!" cried Beth. "All the time, I mean, but now he's handsomer than he can be—I mean he doesn't seem possible!" She was so excited that Natalie caught her by the arm.

"I'm afraid you'll jump over the rail," Natalie laughed, but her own eyes were flashing and she looked as though she, too, found the pageant almost too much for her.

Behind Mr. Cortlandt came his guests in pairs, lords and ladies of the great and magnificent time of English Elizabeth. Such colors, such brocades and satins, velvets, laces, feathers, fans, shoes, above all such ropes and suns of jewels Beth had never believed could exist, outside the stories of Eastern magic.

The five hundred guests came slowly on, stepping to the time of a minuet which the orchestra was now play-

ing. They were all masked and the men vied with the women in gorgeousness of raiment and jewels. Each man held the left hand of his partner in the entering march high in the air, as in a minuet; with the other hand he clasped his feathered, jeweled hat and the women with their right hand waved their fans or toyed with chains of jewels, making them flash anew as they fingered them.

Then came four especially graceful dames, walking backward.

Natalie pointed out one to Beth. "That's mama. No one else on earth could walk backward like that! See how graceful she is; best of them all!" Natalie's voice was excited; it thrilled with proud admiration of her exquisite mother.

Beth arose to see better. Though she was masked Beth felt as sure as Natalie was that the lady in cloth of gold, with a diamond plume in her hair and diamonds radiating everywhere from her splendid costume, was Aunt Alida.

"She is Mary Fitton; she told me, but she said I wasn't to tell any one till to-night," announced Dirk proudly.

"Who is Mary Fitton?" asked Alys.

"I know; Miss Deland and I read about her last week," cried Beth. "She was a lady-in-waiting to Queen Elizabeth, and Shakespeare wrote his sonnets to her—maybe he did; they aren't sure. Oh, look, look! There is the queen! That's why they are walking backward. She isn't masked. Oh, doesn't she look for all the world like Queen Elizabeth?"

One of Aunt Alida's friends represented the queen. She had the requisite long, slender face and the glowing red hair. Taking the part of the queen she required no mask, and indeed she was quite enough burdened without it. Her dress looked as if it were made of a metal; she had the great head-dress, the ruff, the heavy sleeves, the jewels and large feather fan of the portrait of the queen which Elizabeth gave to Sir Henry Sidney.

Behind this Shrove Night Queen Elizabeth came four more ladies-in-waiting, and then the rest of the guests in pairs, as before. The procession ended with unmasked beef-eaters, with their staves of office, like those who had begun it.

The queen's court made a circuit of the ballroom. Then the queen took the throne prepared for her at the upper end of the room, her ladies-in-waiting placed themselves behind her and Mr. Cortlandt stood at his sovereign's right. Two by two the courtiers came to the foot of the throne, moving in a lovely slow dance, made a profound bow to the queen and were presented to her by that resplendent gentleman at the queen's right who, as Beth tried hard to realize, was in actual life her familiar Uncle Jim. She heard the great names of history repeated as she leaned forward to see every detail of the beautiful moving picture, Essex, Leicester, Suffolk, Bacon, Ben Jonson, Raleigh—Raleigh, who, as he made his bow to the queen, threw his cloak before her with a sweep of the arm, recalling the day he had spread it as a carpet over the mud beneath her tread.

Beth knew it was a masquerade, a pageant, but she could not remember that these were not the personages whose names she heard, that she was a little girl in New York, not Judith Shakespeare in the London of three centuries gone. She did not want to remember it; she loved her transformation.

"Oh, there's Shakespeare! He said William Shakespeare, Natalie! Look, look!" cried Beth.

"Don't act 'Much Ado About Nothing,' if it is," laughed Natalie, holding Beth down.

A gentleman in black velvet, plainly clad, with a quill in the hand that carried also a simple hat, with a single black plume, was bowing before the queen at the moment.

"Might one ask why so young a lady is so passionately interested in the appearance of Shakespeare?" asked a voice close behind Beth.

All four children faced about with a jump. They did not know that there was any one besides themselves in the gallery. Aunt Alida had arranged that her dowager friends, and those who had come to see, not to take part in the ball, were placed in the other galleries that, as far as possible, the children might be alone. The gentleman who had spoken had entered unnoticed by them. He had taken off his mask and showed a pleasant, frank, manly face. He wore white velvet with crimson slashing and a crimson cloak. Beth did not know him, and her glance at her cousins showed her that he was a stranger to them.

"Mercy, you frightened me!" cried Beth. "Shake-

speare? Why, I forgot it wasn't really him—he—for a minute. So of course it was exciting."

"It is because it doesn't seem to me to be 'of course' that I wondered," said the newcomer smiling at Beth. "I have known little girls who would have met Shakespeare in the flesh quite calmly. Might I ask if American children read the poet?"

"Why, you're English, aren't you?" cried Dirk, noting his accent. "You'd better believe they don't, not many of them. Beth's death on old things and poets and all that."

"Are you Mr. Cortlandt's children?" asked the stranger with a laugh that won Beth at once.

"We are," said Dirk, waving his hand toward his two sisters. "Beth's our cousin, Beth Bristead. Are you any relation to Lady Harrowdene?"

"No," said the young man. "Not related to her; I suppose there is a connection between us." His blue eyes twinkled and Beth wondered what the joke was which she suspected lurked somewhere in his remark. "You seem a nice quartette of young people. Beth Bristead? Another Elizabeth, I suppose?" Beth saw him look at Natalie with admiration in his eyes, but he did not address her; he probably thought her too old to dispense with the lack of an introduction.

"Yes, I'm Elizabeth, but not often," said Beth. "We're the Shakespeare family ourselves. Natalie is Susanna, Dirk is Hamnet, I'm Hamnet's twin sister, Judith. We had to make believe Alys was Lady Alys

Dudley ; we're visiting her. We don't know there ever was a Lady Alys Dudley, but we needed her, so we made her up. I'm sure there must have been a countess, or something, who would have had Shakespeare's children stay with her, aren't you ?”

“Certain of it,” declared their new acquaintance with conviction. “You seem a bit young to be at a ball, or you would be too young to be allowed at it in England. Miss Cortlandt—it is Miss Cortlandt ?” he bowed deferentially to Natalie—“may be in society, but the others —— ?” He broke off, with a puzzled glance at childish Dirk and Beth.

“We are not at the ball and I am only fifteen,” said Natalie with dignity. “My father begged my mother to break the rule and let us see this ball from the gallery, so here we are. We are in costume, because mama was afraid if any one came up here it would be a discord in the picture—I mean a blot on it—if we were in just our present-day frocks. So our governess designed these costumes in a hurry. We aren't going to use our assumed names ; we aren't going to do anything but watch, but Beth couldn't watch unless she had been fitted out with a name, so she'd feel part of it—like the right piece in a picture puzzle ! She's a queer little Coz—aren't you, Beth ?”

“My word !” exclaimed the newcomer, with his hearty boyish laugh. “I believe you ! But that's the artistic impulse, to preserve the unities ! I'd wager you've been feeling yourself the little Shakespeare girl and that when you heard Will presented to Queen Bess

a few moments ago your first thought was : 'There's father at last !' "

" Oh, how did you know ! " cried Beth, embarrassed, yet pleased.

The young man nodded. " It's not so long since I was a boy," he said. " When I go home I shall have to tell my young nieces and nephews that I found young Americans in New York caring more about our great poet than they do. When I was a small chap it was I who liked making-believe. My brothers and sisters, all but one sister, never were keen for it. I used to play at being Clive, or else Wellington."

" There's nothing half such fun ! " cried Beth. " Were you Wellington ? I suppose a boy has to play he's a soldier, and, of course, Waterloo is splendid. But I'm always Mary Queen of Scots, or something—'most always Queen Mary."

" Dear me, don't you ever make believe you're an American hero—heroine ? " asked the young man. " Nothing could have persuaded me to be anything but an Englishman in my assumed parts. Like the gentleman in Pinafore, don't you know ?

“ “ In spite of all temptations
To belong to other nations
He was an Englishman. ’ ”

The young man sang these words in a low voice, mellow and pleasant in tone.

" Do you think I'm not patriotic ? " asked Beth, looking troubled. " Really and truly I am ! But you know

all those early days my ancestors were in England, so they belong to me just as much as they do to—to Lady Harrowdene! Of course I had a grandfather, great-great-greatest—who fought at Bunker Hill, though.”

“That wasn’t on the British side, I suppose?” the young man inquired innocently.

“No, it wasn’t,” Beth admitted. “But if the king had only understood he’d have seen we were good Englishmen when we wanted our rights, my teacher says.”

“It’s good of you to be so generous to the memory of King George!” This time the young man laughed with his head thrown back in high glee. “What makes you so keen for olden days, little Miss Beth?”

“They’re so interesting,” said Beth promptly. “Knights and courts and princesses and princes! Of course I love the United States best; it *is* best, but we haven’t anything but men and women, or a general, or president. When you just say ‘prince,’ doesn’t it sound splendid? And Your Royal Highness! Oh, it is much nicer to play about princesses and princes!”

“Ah, here you are, prince!” cried a new voice at the back of the gallery. “We’ve looked everywhere for you.”

Natalie and Alys looked around. Three ladies, still masked, stood there. Beth sat absolutely still. “Prince!” What did it mean? But, yes! Uncle Jim had said that there was a royal prince visiting New York in whose honor this ball was given. It must be he, this pleasant-faced, friendly young man to

whom she had been talking freely of her plays, Bunker Hill—oh, what had she said? Beth was so frightened that she could not remember.

The prince had risen, looking like a schoolboy in April, caught going fishing instead of to school.

“I stole away,” he said. “I wanted to see that wonderfully beautiful scene from above and as a whole, not as an actor in it. Don’t scold me, duchess! I found companions, also watching the ball. Duchess, ladies—I do not know who the other two masks conceal—this is the Lady Alys Dudley, of our gracious sovereign, Queen Elizabeth’s court. This is Susanna Shakespeare and Hamnet. And this is Judith Shakespeare. Lady Alys and children of the poet, this is her ladyship, the Duchess of Ravenspur.”

The children had risen for this introduction. Natalie, inspired, swept a deep courtesy and Alys followed suit. Beth tried to courtesy, but failed; her knees refused to bend and come up again, keeping her balance.

“It’s pleasant to meet Will’s children; we like well his plays at court,” said the duchess, performing her part nobly. “Really, prince, I must beg you to return to the floor with us. Do you realize you are guest of honor to-night, that the ball is yours? Dancing is begun, the formal dances, you see. There is to be an Elizabethan play soon. Mrs. Cortlandt is wonderful! Pray come, dear prince.”

“You see, new friends of mine, what a price one has to pay for honors in this world,” said the prince, turning to the children with his bright, boyish smile.

“Coming, duchess! Good-bye, Lady Alys, Miss Susanna, Master Hamnet. Good-bye, dear little Judith Shakespeare. I hope that we may meet again before I sail. In any case you shall hear from me.”

He was gone. Beth gasped, Natalie and Alys began to chatter excitedly, but she was mute. A prince! First a countess, then a prince! Surely this was a Wonder-Winter, a fairy tale, not merely illustrated, but lived!

Below on the floor moved the resplendent dances of olden times. At the upper end of the room, right among the spectators, just as Shakespeare's own company of players acted, without scenery of setting, sometimes in the courtyard of an inn, a short play was enacted while the dancing still went on. It was a kaleidoscope of color and movement and beauty unspeakable. The other three young people forgot the prince in their interest in it, but Beth saw it all only vaguely. Her eyes followed an athletic young figure in white and crimson, and she kept saying over to herself:

“The king's son! The son of a king, and I know him!”

At midnight a beautiful series of groups was formed all down the room. Queen Elizabeth stood before her throne; there rang through the room the single voice of a silver trumpet, blown by a picturesque herald in silver and blue at the queen's side. At its summons all the masks were dropped; the guests stood revealed. Natalie and Alys grew wildly excited identifying those they knew. Beth found the duchess. She was re-

lieved to find that she did not in the least resemble the duchess in "Alice," whose thick ugliness she unconsciously had in mind. This Duchess of Ravenspur was rather young and decidedly handsome, and Beth was grateful to her for being so.

Then Miss Deland appeared and laid a hand on Natalie's shoulder, saying :

"Your mother asked me to tell you, dears, that at midnight all Cinderellas leave a ball and that it is now midnight. She wishes you to return to your ashes in the fireplace ; in other words to go to bed ! Supper is served the guests now ; after that there will be modern dancing until the ball is over. You have seen the best of it."

"We have seen more than that, Miss Deland," said Beth solemnly and impressively. "We have seen and know a prince, *the* prince ! Do you think he ever will be king ?"

"It isn't likely," smiled Miss Deland. "There are three brothers older than he, but of course there's no saying !"

"Well, he's the king's son anyway," declared Beth. "He's a real king's son, and he talked about making believe and things just like—anybody !"

"There you are ! He is like anybody !" cried republican and unromantic Dirk. "He's a trump, something like Bob Leonard ; not a bit nifty ; he's all right."

CHAPTER XVII

THE RIDE DOWN THE QUIET ROAD

“**H**OW do you keep Easter at home, Beth? I mean how *did* you keep Easter in your old home, Beth? We intend this to be home to you now and henceforth, you know.” Mrs. Cortlandt smiled at Beth over a book which she held, but which, plainly, did not engage her attention.

“Keep Easter?” echoed Beth searching her memory for the right answer. “Why, I don’t know. We — Sometimes the daffodils are out, sometimes they’re not. Janie and I color eggs; just a few. Aunt Rebecca never likes me to use many. She thinks the colors and pictures hurt the eggs for eating, but they really don’t. When Easter comes in April hens are apt to be setting, so eggs are rather scarce. But coloring them doesn’t do a bit of harm, if only Aunt Rebecca thought so. She says it takes away her appetite to see red rabbits, and rabbits in coats, and blue stripes, and pink flowers, on her breakfast egg. I asked her to scramble it, or poach it, so she wouldn’t see the decorations. She thought I was saucy, but I didn’t once think of being. You can get lovely designs and colors in a package, eight colors and a hundred pictures for five cents, and you can make shaded colors and change around a lot

with the eight sheets. I'd like to fix eggs for everybody, but it's no use!" Beth shook her head over the unreasonableness of Aunt Rebecca. "Janie and I do them for each other, though, and we fix up a strawberry basket nest with tissue papers and leave it on each other's back porch. A German girl showed us about it; the Easter rabbit lays the eggs there, you see! It's quite nice. We don't do anything else special, unless it is to wear our straw hat for the first time, and open our collection boxes in Sunday-school. Oh, yes! We all get a growing geranium slip, or some plant in Sunday-school that day."

"Well, that doesn't sound exciting!" laughed Alys.

"What a talker you are, Bethikins, when once you are set going!" Aunt Alida laughed too. "We should have gone into the country for Easter; we usually do, but your Uncle Jim thought that you would like this Easter in town. We shall not be likely to spend the next one here. You will probably be in Virginia with us next Easter, at Old Point Comfort, or at the North Carolina mountains, or the Jersey coast; not in New York, anyway. So your uncle wants you to see the bright New York Easter this year. I hope you realize what a personage you are, small Beth, changing all our habits in this way!"

"I—I think I feel sorry about it," said Beth in a small voice.

"You needn't, dear; I shall enjoy it greatly," said Mrs. Cortlandt hastily. "It doesn't seem possible that the Shrove night ball is already five weeks past!"

"The prince hasn't gone home, has he?" asked Beth.

"No, but he sails this week," said Aunt Alida. "We dined with him at Mrs. Huntley's last night. He asked most kindly after my four young people and said that he meant to see you again before he sailed. But he is scarcely allowed to rest from being entertained and seeing the country, so I'm not sure you will see him. He came here purposely to look into some aspects of our industrial conditions and his final visits to institutions of reform are crowding upon him thick and fast."

"He's very nice, very," said Beth with pensive emphasis. "It's rather sad to think that we can't see him again after he gets to England. Even if you went there, Aunt Alida, you couldn't see him as if he weren't 'way off in some palace, could you? And I'm pretty sure he would like Trump. He looks and acts like a person who would love a pony like Trump. I wish he could come here and go to see him before he goes back and sits in the shadow of the throne."

Natalie fairly shrieked at this speech. "The shadow of the throne! Beth, for pity's sake, what makes you say such queer, fearfully funny things?" she gasped. "And who is going to sit in it, the prince or Trump?"

Beth laughed. "Maybe it might be Trump, if the prince saw him and fell in love with him. I suppose you couldn't refuse a prince your pony and be polite. It's called being in the shadow of the throne in books," she added.

"You will see the prince when you go to England; 'the shadow of the throne' will lift long enough for

that. We shall go over when Natalie is twenty ; she will be presented at court then. But we're likely to go before. The prince and his brothers and sisters rode ponies at your age ; they are on the retired list, enjoying pasturage and comfort now, for the sake of past service. The prince is a famous rider ; you were right in thinking he would be interested in Trump. Just a moment, children ; I am called."

Aunt Alida shut her handkerchief into her book and went over to the telephone that stood on the small teakwood table near her couch ; they were gathered in Aunt Alida's sitting-room.

"Yes. Mrs. Cortlandt, yes. Oh ! No, I didn't know when you spoke. We were that instant speaking of you, prince," she said and the girls looked at one another and Beth leaned forward with sudden interest in her eyes.

"How exceedingly kind you are !" exclaimed Mrs. Cortlandt, after she had silently listened, with eyes and lips smiling, to the voice at the other end of the wire, which the children could not hear. "Yes, they all ride. Certainly they may. Without any chaperon, no grown person ? Not even me ? I think you will be a more than sufficient chaperon ! May I send a groom, in case of trouble of any sort ? Thank you. At eleven ? They shall be ready. I will have their mounts here. Indeed I am grateful, prince, and I can assure you of a blissful quartette of young things when they are told of your invitation. Good-bye, prince. Once more my sincerest thanks."

Aunt Alida rang off and turned to the three girls, her face alight with her great tidings.

"Wasn't that a coincidence, dear lassies? Could you guess who telephoned, with what message?" she demanded breathlessly.

"The prince wants us to ride with him!" cried Natalie, Alys and Beth, as if it were a carefully rehearsed trio.

"Precisely that!" Aunt Alida clapped her hands, laughing as though the guess were a brilliant triumph. "At eleven to-morrow! Not a grown person with you, but the prince! He says he wants it to be a youthful frolic, just as he rode with his sisters and brothers. So you are going. You must take him out on our Quiet Road, as we call it. I believe I will have a lunch put up, to be hung in a pannier over some one's saddle! I'm certain the prince would enjoy its flavor, eaten out-of-doors, informally. You will show him Trump, Bethie!"

"Aunt Alida, I can make fudge rather splendidly. Do you think I might make some to take with us?" Beth asked anxiously.

"I'm not sure the cook would allow it, dear; I certainly would, but he is—formidable is a mild, safe word!" Aunt Alida said.

"Mrs. Hodgman has a gas stove in her rooms; I saw it," cried Beth. "If you would let me make it, Aunt Alida, it would be fine to eat out under a tree, and when I went home, and made fudge for the girls, I'd say I was Fudge Maker to the Royal Family—like

the labels on English gelatines and needles and things ! ”

“ Oh, Beth, you are a scream ! ” cried Alys. “ How you mix up ! I wouldn't care to be like a label myself. ”

“ Beth's meaning is clear, ” laughed her aunt. “ Bless your heart, Bethikins, if you can win Mrs. Hodgman over, I've no objections to your making anything you like. ”

“ Mrs. Hodgman never has to be won over ; she is always 'way over when you ask her a favor, ” said Beth, as she ran off to ask the housekeeper this favor.

She ran into Dirk in the doorway. “ You've got Hodgie's measure, all right, ” he remarked, hearing what Beth had just said. “ I was around seeing Ken Appleton's new printing-press, ” he added, replying to the inquiry in his mother's eyes. “ Anything up ? ”

Beth wheeled in the doorway, where she had lingered to hear what Dirk would say to the plan for the morrow, and she joined the other two girls in telling him about it.

“ Well, that is nifty ! ” Dirk said. “ We'll have a great time ; not better than when we ride with father that way, though ! The prince is a nice chap. He's a little like Bob Leonard. Wish he could go, too ! ”

Alys laughed, but Natalie colored and said spiritedly : “ I think Mr. Leonard is something like the prince, too. They're both so real, not thinking of themselves at all. I believe Mr. Leonard's more like a prince than the prince is. ”

“ So are you—like a real sort, I mean, ” approved Dirk warmly.

“Well, if I’m going to make fudge ——” Beth suggested and departed on her own implication that it was time she was off.

Mrs. Hodgman was not merely willing to have Beth at work in her rooms: she welcomed her coming. Beth instinctively felt that the housekeeper had a sorrowful life-story lying behind her present. Kind as Aunt Alida was, the little girl suspected that Mrs. Hodgman was often lonely in a position that made her one with neither servants nor employer. To suspect a heartache and to try to relieve it were one with sweet Beth. Mrs. Hodgman had grown to love her dearly for the sunshine Beth did not forget to bring to her by frequent visits as she sat alone.

Beth triumphantly made her fudge, beating it so long that she risked being late to dinner, but, as she explained to Mrs. Hodgman, “princely fudge must be the best ever.” It was. Aunt Alida gave her a captivating box for it and Beth went to bed early, to be ready and fresh for the Event.

Natalie, Alys and Beth were waiting in their riding habits before half-past ten, trying not to fume and fuss that it was but half-past ten. The horses were waiting in the courtyard fifteen minutes ahead of time, Tim in charge. He was to ride with the party.

Beth slipped down and tied a bow of wide satin ribbon on Trump’s bridle, on the head strap. It stood up between his ears precisely like a wide bow on the top of a small girl’s head; the effect intoxicated Beth. She kissed her pony frantically.

"I put it there in honor of the prince—red, for the English flag, you know," she explained to Tim. "But isn't it just wildly becoming to him?"

"Sure, a green bow would be the right one, Miss Beth," said Tim, with his twinkle. "Trump's for Home Rule and the lovely green isle, an' it's none of the English red he'd be wearin', give him his choice in the matter: St. Patrick's day just past, more by token."

"Oh, well, I suppose what he really likes is the red, white and blue, but I know he is glad to honor the prince's flag to-day," retorted Beth, tearing herself away from the pony, who cocked his eye after her under his bang and big red bow in a manner that made going difficult.

The prince was punctual to the minute. He was riding a noble English hunting horse, lent him by one of his American friends, and he sat him with the strength and grace that is the perfection of horsemanship.

At the last moment Alys and Beth felt embarrassed to go down to greet their royal escort and hung back. But Natalie and Dirk led the way with quiet confidence, Dirk because he felt no shyness, taking the prince for granted, as he took Mr. Leonard; Natalie, because she was endowed with so much of her mother's instinctive tact that her one thought was to set the prince at ease with them, the young Americans, to whom he had undertaken to be kind.

The prince sprang from his horse and stood bareheaded, waiting, when the door opened and Mrs. Cortlandt came out, followed by her four young people.

"Quite ready? That's right," cried the prince, after he had greeted Mrs. Cortlandt. "We must be off immediately, then. Ah, what noble horses!" he added. "That Kentucky type cannot be surpassed under saddle. And the little beggar from the Shetland isles! Now, could that belong to Judith Shakespeare?"

His merry smile set Beth at ease completely. She shook her head hard.

"That's Trump; he belongs to Beth Bristead," she said.

"Let Beth Bristead mount him, then, and off we go! Let me give you a hand, Miss Natalie, Miss Alys and Beth Bristead."

The prince held his hand for Natalie's foot and swung her into the saddle, then Alys. But Beth gave her hands to Tim and was jumped into the saddle and sat laughing on Trump when the prince was ready to do her like service.

"This red bow is for the English flag," Beth explained, touching the end of Trump's flaring decoration, with much of its color leaping into her cheeks.

"My word!" The prince laughed, swinging into his own saddle. "Indeed I'm flattered! I wish I had thought to tie red, white and blue on this chap of mine, but I'm stupid. Will your brother Dick—Dirk—precede, to guide us? Let us take a country road, if it does not need too long to get on one from your narrow city, which seems to be spreading out over the country, northward, like jam on a long stick of Italian bread."

"Oh, isn't that just what it does!" cried Natalie appreciatively. She and Beth rode with the prince, Alys and Dirk preceded them, Tim in the rear.

"We were going to take you on what we call the Quiet Road. There is a piece of good woods still standing about seven miles out; we love it, sir—prince——" Natalie stammered at the end of her sentence, not knowing what was the proper form of address for a young girl like her to use toward a royal personage.

"The Quiet Road sounds like the very thing," approved the prince. "And we are all comrades of the road to-day. Formality must be laid aside. I shall call you all by your first names: I've got them right? Natalie, Alys, Beth and Dirk? I thought so. I have quite a lot of names, six Christian names, besides a few family ones. It isn't just the thing, I suppose, for young people to call an old gentleman, twenty-seven years old, by an unset first name, so to speak. So, as I am one of the United States' English cousins, perhaps you would better call me Cousin Hal. My mother called me Hal, when I was a small chap. Henry is one of my names, you know. Do you agree?"

"If—if you say it is respectful," said Natalie, looking so lovely as she blushed that the prince's eyes reflected it.

"Couldn't we make believe that you are Prince Hal—you are, of course—I mean the old one, and that we are riding back after the battle of Agincourt?" asked Beth.

"Such a child for history and for playing at it!" exclaimed "Cousin Hal." "Surely, if you like. Just you wait till I get home and crush my nieces and nephews, telling them of the little American who knows English history so well and never loses a chance to bring it to life! I'll shame them, the scamps!"

"Would you tell us about them—Cousin Hal?" Natalie's voice trembled, but she bravely brought out the alarming name.

"Bravo, pretty Natalie!" cried "Cousin Hal." "What a jolly morning we're having! There's nothing like a young party like this, on horseback! I'll tell you all I can about the children at home; they're nice children."

Whereupon the prince began to tell them of "the children at home." As he talked he showed them a portrait of a merry, sensible, well-trained group of youngsters, brave, dutiful, but full of human nature. His listeners almost forgot, after a while, that the boy so like Dirk in his traits was the heir to the throne. Alys and Dirk fell back to hear the story. It was plain to be seen that this prince was a fond uncle and that he liked nothing better than frolics with the king's children, his nieces and nephews.

It was a beautiful morning, late in March. The air was full of the damp warmth of open ground; the odors of earth and flowing sap were upon its gentle movement. As the horsemen rode out "the Quiet Road" bluebirds, robins, song sparrows, peewees, the chorusing blackbirds uttered delicious notes from low growths along the stone rows.

"We turn in here, Cousin Hal," said Natalie, indicating with her stock a road that looked like a lane, leading nowhere. "Perhaps it isn't too damp to sit on a log for a little while. Mama had a tiny luncheon put up, mostly for the fun of eating it out-of-doors. Tim has it in a hamper on the front of his saddle."

"Now I call that downright good news and most kind of Mrs. Cortlandt! She must be as good as she is beautiful, as the story-books say, and that is a strong statement in her case, for she is wonderfully handsome. I, for one, am a bit keen set; how about you, Dirk?" cried the prince, slapping his riding boot boyishly.

"I'm always hungry, pretty much. It's this way: When you're riding you could eat a bite every time the horse puts a hoof down, but you can just as well let it go till you're back, because nothing fills you up, anyway," said Dirk, so seriously that they all laughed.

It was a pretty little glade to which the children conducted their older comrade. Here they tethered the horses and found for themselves two or three logs of various lengths upon which it seemed prudent to sit; they were sun-dried and time-cured and much of their bark had peeled away.

"Now, Tim, my man, where's that hamper we've heard about?" asked the prince.

"Here it is, sir," said Tim, bringing it forward.

It was a small hamper, necessarily, to be carried on a horse, but it was carefully packed, with great judgment, and its contents were exactly right and exactly enough to take the edge comfortably off a riding ap-

petite and yet not spoil the meal that would be served on the riders' return. Beth's fudge was the dessert.

"How delicious!" cried "Cousin Hal"—he seemed like Cousin Hal now!—taking a big bite out of the middle of a sandwich of thin roast beef and crisp lettuce. "Isn't it fine to get off like this and be allowed to eat without plates or forks, just as they ate in Eden?"

"Do you feel that way, too?" cried Beth, delighted to share an experience. "I think if they would put people out in the woods and let them eat pieces of pie and things in their fingers, they'd never have to get tonics in bottles, nor doctors."

"Beth, there spake wisdom!" "Cousin Hal" accepted a large triangle of fudge as he spoke and rolled up his eyes at the first bite in a way that sent Dirk heels over head in a somersault. "Though truth compels me to state that meals under almost any circumstances do not come amiss with me." He arose, brushing crumbs out of the folds of his trousers where they were tucked into his boots. "I'm going to put that scamp of a Trump through a trick or so and teach him a new one. I've sugar in my pocket to reward him, if he gets the idea. My word, but that fine fudge makes one thirsty!"

"Oh, there's a fine spring here. To think we forgot it!" cried Beth. "Dirk and Tim will fetch water."

"Not they, not without me!" cried "Cousin Hal." "Isn't this a free day in which I'm not to be shown deference? Take me with you, Dirk, Tim. I shall drink from the spring with this cup!" He held up his palms together, made hollow.

When the spring had quenched the thirst of them all the prince put Trump through his brief repertory of accomplishments. Then he taught him to "waltz." It was not a precise waltz, to be sure, but as the prince danced in spiral curves, softly whistling a waltz, the pony, after a few failures, followed him remarkably. Beth was in ecstasy.

"I never, never saw anything so wonderful!" she cried. "Isn't he clever? And how can you make him?"

"I have a sort of understanding with all horse-flesh," said the prince, rewarding Trump with sugar and rubbing his ears as the pony affectionately nuzzled him. "In the regiment, my regiment, they get me to reason with a horse that is troublesome and he nearly always harkens to me."

"Are you in the army?" asked Dirk with intense interest.

"Yes, Dirk. You see, in a way, I was rather born to it. They made me an officer when I was a small lad. I had no choice but to do what was cut out for me—not that I don't like it," said the prince quietly. "That brings me to what I wanted to say. This has been such a delightful morning, don't you think, that I for one would like something lasting to come of it. I was turning over in my mind the night after the ball what I could do to prove to you how much I enjoyed meeting you up in the gallery and what friends we were. I thought of asking you to ride with me as the best thing I could devise, for it would cement our

friendship by making us really well acquainted. Then, that wasn't enough ; I wanted something more, to remember the riding by. It would go on like an endless chain, at that rate, now wouldn't it ?" he paused to laugh. "But here it stops: not our friendship, but souvenirs of it—for a time, I mean. I really did not know what to suggest to myself to get, or to do, in memory of to-day. Then it flashed upon me. Like Archimedes, don't you know, I sat up and cried Eureka ! What do you think I invented ?"

"I don't see how any one could possibly guess what you would think of, you think of everything wonderful and different," cried Beth fervently, as the prince looked at her.

She was burning with admiring affection for this friend who turned the every-day world into a tale of absorbing interest and who could also teach Trump to waltz.

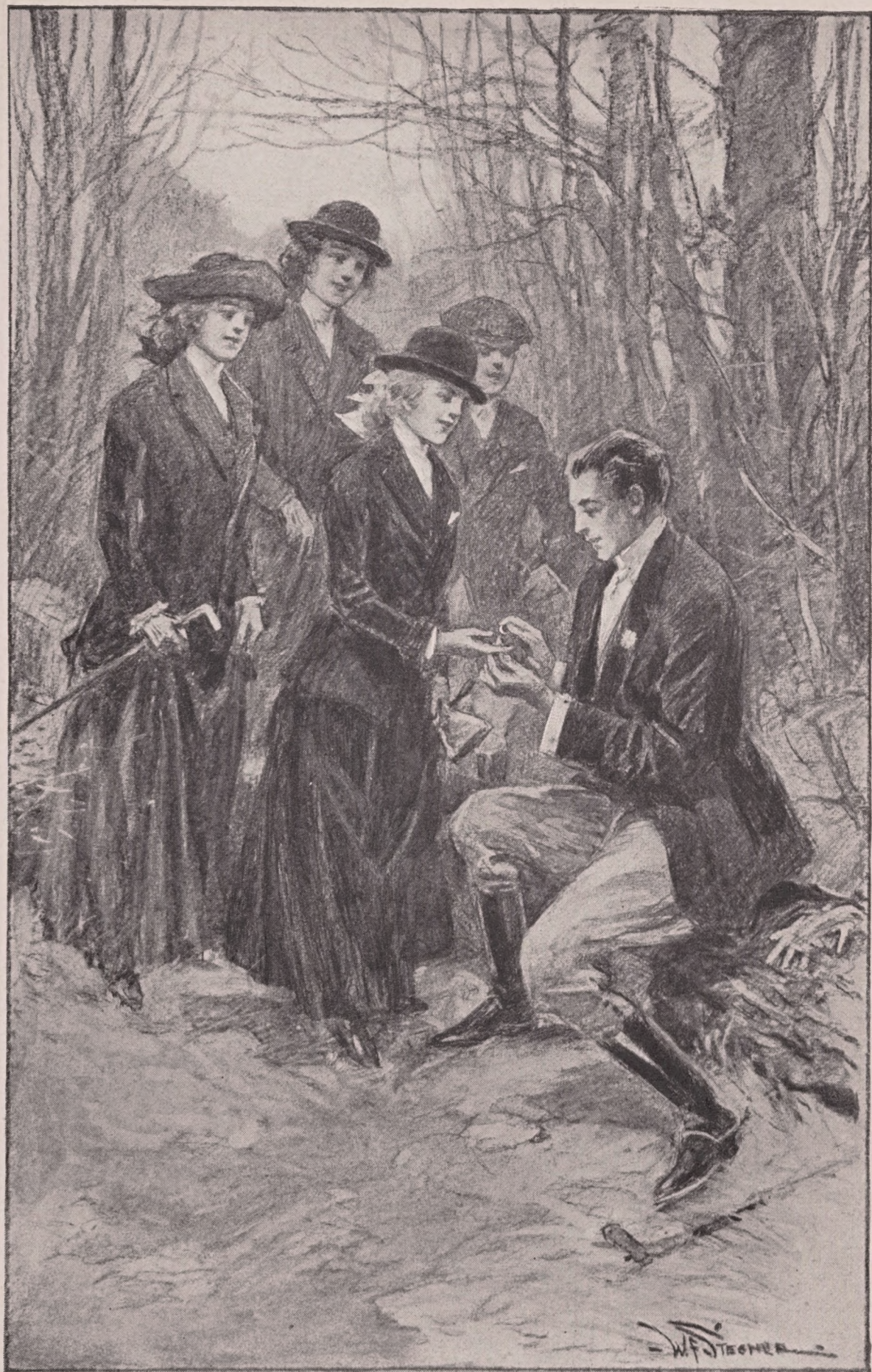
"Well, let me tell you !" cried the prince, one hand patting Beth's shoulder in acknowledgment of her enthusiasm. "I decided to found an order ! Don't you know ? Like the Order of the Golden Fleece, or our own Order of the Garter, with an insignia, a badge, don't you know, and an object. What do you say to it ?"

"Sure ; it'll be fine ! Of course we don't know anything about it yet, but it'll be fine," cried Dirk with the most flattering confidence.

"It would be fine to have an army like you, Dirk ; ready to follow wherever one leads !" laughed the

prince. "My idea is something in the way of such a loyal army. You see lots of people never ask what they ought to do, but only what they want to do in this world. It leads to no end of mischief. Sometimes two people want to do exactly opposite things, two people, I mean, who stand in such relation to each other that whatever one does makes the other happy or wretched, blessed or ruined, according to which course the first one takes. No one is free in this world; we're all tied and bound together by all sorts of fine lines and there is no greater nonsense talked than to say that any of us is free to go on as he pleases, regardless of others, or of the obligations of his position in society and toward his country. It's my idea that happiness can come to each of us and to the world only when people stop to think, if there's a question to decide, not what is pleasant, but what is right; not what they *want*, but what they *ought* to do. So I should like to found a little order over here in the United States of five members, Natalie, Alys, Dirk, Beth and myself, to be called the Order of the Strong Hearted. The members pledge themselves to aim to do their duty every time, regardless of whether it is hard or easy, and not to talk about it, nor make a fuss, but to do it, as becomes the strong of heart. And here is our insignia, if you approve it."

The prince, looking flushed by his own earnestness and embarrassed in setting forth what, after all, was a high ideal, told in simple words, produced from his pocket four small boxes. Opening them he displayed



THE PRINCE SLIPPED A RING UPON EACH HAND.

four rings, curiously wrought, of a beautiful design, each one set with a dark oriental sapphire, cut oblong.

"Oh!" gasped the four children, too delighted and impressed to say more.

"I had the rings made," explained the prince. "The sapphire represents the true blue of loyalty and love. The carving—see the design? Links, twisted and intertwisted to signify that no one stands alone. The rings are suited now to your fourth fingers, I'm sure, so, as your hands grow, they will come to be right for the smallest finger, where they will really look best. Will you let me confer upon you the Order of the Strong Hearted and invest you with its insignia?"

"Yes," said Natalie and Beth together.

One by one they came in turn to the prince and he slipped a ring upon each hand, saying: "I invest you with the Order of the Strong Hearted. When the hour comes for choice, you are to choose the right, your life long, doing your duty bravely, as becomes the Strong of Heart."

It was almost a solemn little ceremony. It was a royal right to found an order and to invest its members with its insignia. Beth felt uplifted, awed, but profoundly happy. This was not making believe, yet it held all the charm of the best making believe, combined with reality.

"Now, shall we ride back again?" suggested the prince. "It is the worst of pleasant things that they must end, but, on the other hand, it is the best of unpleasant things, and so we come to an average good."

They rode back rapidly. Once more the prince, who, as he told them of his new Order, seemed every inch a prince, was once more "Cousin Hal," the merry, boyish comrade of the day.

They reached home in good time, but the prince bade them farewell at the door.

"I can't possibly come in, thank you, Mrs. Cortlandt. I assure you it would be a great pleasure to me, but I fear I am already late to an engagement to lunch. Good-bye, my dear little cousins. Some day you will visit me in England. It is not good-bye for always, you know!"

He stood bareheaded under the porte-cochère and took both hands of each of the Cortlandts and Beth in a hearty farewell clasp. He held Beth's hands for a moment longer than the others. Then he stooped and kissed her cool cheek.

"Good-bye, dear little Beth," he said. "You are a sweet, old-fashioned little girl and I hope you will be a happy woman, as I know you will be a good and charming one."

Then he sprang upon his beautiful horse and was gone. Beth walked into the house in a dazed way, turning the ring upon her finger.

"He was a king's son," she said. "If it weren't for this ring I could not believe it had all happened! He is the best, the splendoriest, and he is gone! Oh, why do people have to come, like falling stars, right out of nothing and then go away into it?" Tears stood in her eyes. Aunt Alida kissed them away.

"It was a beautiful little adventure, dearest," she said. "Natalie has told me of the Order of the Strong Hearted. The prince has done a really lovely thing in establishing it. You cannot know now how far-reaching it may be in its consequences on your life and character. I am profoundly grateful to him, and I think he is, in the highest sense, a nobleman."

Three days later the paper announced that the prince had sailed. But he had left behind him rings upon four growing hands and a deep impression, a noble ideal, in four impressionable, unfolding hearts.

CHAPTER XVIII

“FLORIDA PASQUA”

EASTERTIDE brought with it weather that might have been called unseasonable warmth but that almost any sort of weather is seasonable in the spring of the Eastern states.

Suddenly New York seemed to bloom. Not only were the parks and squares gorgeous with flaunting tulips, but the shop windows were equally gay with flowers, living and artificial, and with hats and gowns that vied with them. These last were repeated in the streets, worn by springlike maidens and bright-faced women. For that matter the blossoming plants were offered for sale on the curbstones in places, or went nodding along, enjoying their drive in vendors' carts, through the narrow streets of which Beth caught glimpses in her own drives with her uncle, northward, into Westchester County, whither the car took them often since it had grown so warm, and where she rode Trump on rarer occasions.

“Isn't it happy!” cried Beth. “All of it, the whole of New York! You wouldn't think a big city could get so much spring into it. It's so bright and flowery! The country isn't so bright now; fields look scrubby in March, but here—well, it's just like Easter, all risen up after winter!”

“Your wonder-winter is over, Miss Beth,” said Anna Mary, who had knocked at Beth’s door with a message from Mrs. Cortlandt while Frieda was finishing Beth’s toilet for a drive.

“A wonder-spring is even better!” cried Beth, nodding at Anna Mary in the glass. “The reddest geranium would look like black crêpe to me, if I weren’t going to stay right on. But the summer will be better than the winter, so I’m enjoying spring. Aunt Alida isn’t going herself, Anna Mary?”

“No, Miss Beth,” said Anna Mary. “She’s sending me.”

Beth ran down-stairs. The hall was filled with plants of small sizes which Mrs. Cortlandt was sending to the families whence Beth and Anna Mary had drawn the guests for the Christmas tree; that tree seemed to have been long ago.

At one side stood a small forest of bloom. Great azaleas in all their shades of soft reds, pinks and whites; orchids, roses, lilies-of-the-valley, violets so large and sweet that they dominated the other fragrances, Easter lilies, spireas, ferns, all dressed in plaited tissue paper skirts, like unearthly ballet dancers, and tied with broad sashes of beautiful ribbons, each with a card pendant from its side.

Cut flowers covered the hall table, chairs and the seat of the long carved Italian bench. They were partly revealing their loveliness through paraffine paper, like veiled Turkish brides, or they were thrusting long stems through the end of white boxes of

incredible length, to hint that on the other end of those stems was a rose of perfection.

"Dear me, Anna Mary, it seems as though I must be dead. You wouldn't think there were such flowers, except in heaven, nor half so many! Are we to take all these to the poor?"

"What a queer thing to say, Miss Beth!" cried Anna Mary. "No, indeed, then! These on this side we take. Those over there are sent to your aunt; don't you see they have cards on them? Mrs. Cortlandt has sent as many and more herself. They're ordered at a big florist's and left on Holy Saturday where they're to go. 'Tis a nice way to wish your friends a good Easter, but thousands of dollars it costs—though it does seem wrong to be considerin' cost along with Easter lilies and the like!"

"I should think you'd have to think what it costs just as much as you'd have to smell them; it seems to come right up at you, just as strong," said Beth, inhaling a lily as she spoke.

She and Anna Mary got into the car and Léon, with the help of three maids, set the flower pots into the tonneau and piled the boxes of cut flowers on the seats which were unoccupied and around Léon's feet.

They drove slowly through the streets for fear of disturbing the potted plants. Other cars which they passed were similarly laden, though none to their degree. Mrs. Cortlandt liked to make sure that her gifts were properly delivered, so did not risk their going astray in the tenements.

Once more Beth was moved to profound pity by the crowded poverty she saw. Sharp as had been the contrast at Christmas between it and the holly-trimmed Christmas gaiety from which she had come, still sharper was the contrast now between the evil-smelling, congested tenements and the spacious hall in her uncle's house, fragrant and lovely with the crowning successes of the master florists.

“Do you think the flowers will help any?” she asked Anna Mary wistfully. “It seems as though they couldn't know Christ had risen and what alleluia meant, in such places.”

“Sometimes they know better than in great houses, bless your dear heart, Miss Beth,” said Anna Mary. “There do be people in such places that know so well that Christ lived on earth and left hope to them when He left it, that they're almost glad to be poor, because He was. Sure, there's no place so mean, or so crowded that there isn't space enough to let in God Almighty! And that's a comfort to think of when we're needin' it. And any decent person craves comfortin' thoughts when they see what misery there do be, and that at Eastertide.”

Beth came home thoughtful from her beautiful errand. She had begged to be allowed to go with Anna Mary and her aunt had willingly consented. Neither of her girls could have been induced to go. Aunt Alida thought that perhaps in little Beth there might develop the one who would best use the Cortlandt wealth, in the ways which she herself believed wealth must be used.

She hoped that Beth's unconscious goodness, her instinctive choice of the best, might, as time went on, bend Natalie and Alys into the unworldly women of the world which was Aunt Alida's ideal of a woman of their class. She looked upon Beth as hers, as permanently and almost as really as were her own children. She was daily thankful for the little girl who fitted so perfectly into the household life and needs, in spite of her differences from it.

Sunday morning — Easter Sunday — dawned the brightest day of all that week of summer brightness.

"Get dressed early, Bethie," Uncle Jim advised Beth at breakfast. "We must be well ahead of the service hour to get comfortably to our pew to-day. And here is your Easter card for the contribution box." He handed Beth a crisp five dollar bill, of which he had provided four for the children.

Beth took it with a smile of thanks. "I suppose some day I should get used to it," she said, without explaining to what she referred. "At home the children usually have a nickel, children who are properly brought up. Aunt Rebecca scorns pennies. She says it's a queer thing that Christians call religion the greatest thing in the world and hunt out the smallest coin there is to support it."

Frieda had been to church early that morning, so had Anna Mary. Frieda told Beth about the pretty German Easter customs which her mother had described to her, following up her description with two or three lovely German Easter legends, so that not only the hour

of dressing seemed short, but Beth was attuned to Easter anthems when the limousine was driven to the door and she took her place in it with her back to the driver.

Aunt Alida in her silvery green with dark green plumes on her white hat and Killarney roses in the lace on her breast, Natalie in the dull blue that brunettes may wear, Alys in her pale golden brown, how lovely they looked, Beth thought admiringly watching them as they drove along.

“’Cute, n’est ce pas ?” whispered Alys as, in turn, they watched Beth.

“Perfectly darling face, so pretty and so dear !” returned Natalie warmly.

Beth was totally unconscious of their approval as she happily watched the stream of carriages and cars slowly flowing up and down the avenue, and the crowds, gathering in density as they neared one of the great churches.

Beth’s Easter gown was white ; the simplest of straight coats in a rough silk and wool, with just enough black velvet to set off its fine lines and texture. Her hat was soft and drooping white chip, with a scarf of white and gold and a single black plume. The costume brought out the childish pink and white of Beth’s skin, the blueness of her happy eyes, the pure gold of her hair, with the darkening of its future tint beginning to creep into it.

“We must walk home to-day, Alida. It is necessary to show Beth the Easter parade,” said Uncle Jim.

Aunt Alida laughed. “Are you sure that isn’t an

excuse, like the grandfather who takes the small boy to the circus? I suspect you will like to see it yourself; it is long since we were on the avenue as part of its display," she said.

"If it proves entertaining, that won't be a misfortune. Come, Bethie, here we are, and you are the first one out, because you are so badly in the way!" said Uncle Jim, passing Beth when the car stopped before the door of the great stone church to which the Cortlandts came each Sunday morning.

The sidewalk and approach to the church were massed with people, even on the side street upon which Léon had drawn up the car. On the Fifth Avenue side the crowds extended even into the road; policemen were detailed there to prevent accidents. The side entrance was kept for pewholders; through it the Cortlandt party slowly made its way, for here, too, progress was slow.

Beth caught her breath as she entered the church. The air was heavy with the scent of flowers; the beauty of the scene transported her. The light streamed dimly from the windows of many-colored glass; its rays sought and were lost in the wilderness of flowers that turned the now-familiar building into a region of heavenly enchantment for Beth. Ferns and lance-like pandanus were massed against pillars, roses above them in swaying grace. Lilies formed a second rail within the altar railing; everywhere roses and still more roses, and lilies and lilies! Beth's eyes dilated and swam with dewy joy.

“Don’t you suppose, Natalie,” she asked, under cover of the slow progress to the pew, “that when God spoke to Moses in the burning bush it was a rose-bush, burning with its own red roses?”

The service was wonderful to poetical Beth. From the time she arose to her feet at the distant sound of the choir singing and the white vested choristers wound in among the flowers, singing their alleluias, till the last faint echo of their final amen came from afar, as sweet and distinct, yet illusive, as the odor of one of the roses, Beth was unconscious of all the world; she knew only the world of unearthly beauty and ideals.

They came out of church to the glorious strains of the Hallelujah chorus sung by the choir of the church, supplemented by men and women and a glorious orchestra. Beth lingered so slowly along that the others far outstripped her, impeded though they all were by the throngs which had filled every available space in the church. Uncle Jim turned back to find her. He found her forgetful of all around her, slipped into a vacant pew, drinking in the volume of glorious sound pouring over her as, from side to side, the voices tossed and repeated the Hallelujahs of Handel’s grand chorus.

Uncle Jim tucked Beth’s hand into his arm and waited with her till it was sung.

“I don’t blame you, Bethie, for clinging to the last note of the Hallelujah chorus. Some day you must hear the whole oratorio from which it is taken—the

oratorio of the Messiah. Now we must go, dear. It is all over," he said.

Uncle Jim brought Beth out into the flooding light of noon on an early spring day in the broad thoroughfare of bright New York.

The little girl blinked ; she was returning, not merely to the strong sunshine, out of the dim church, but into the actual world from vague visions of angels and celestial glories. Yet the world around her was beautiful and wonderful, too, for the avenue was dense with people going slowly in two distinct streams up and down, north and south, on the outer and inner sides of the sidewalk.

Uncle Jim skilfully steered his family into the descending line on the inner side, and Beth found herself part of "the Easter parade."

Occasionally the Cortlandts passed some one whom they knew, but rarely. The crowd was made up of people from another world within the great city. There were sharp-faced, pert girls in the extreme of grotesque fashions ; many foreign faces ; families headed by women who looked like overgrown heads of cabbage decked out in flower petals, so blowsy were they, yet so gay in what they considered spring finery. Many of the faces bore the stamp of privation and a hard tussle to live ; they showed that there must have been self-denial in necessities to get together the money to buy the luxuries of Easter garments. The girls wore the highest heeled pumps, the thinnest of stockings, the narrowest of skirts, the closest of hats, with stiffest

feathers extending out at the rear, as was the fashion of that spring. It was a caricature of style; these girls who worked hard for their living were bound to prove that they knew “the latest thing from Paris” as well as their more fortunate sisters. But every one, however tawdry her finery, wore a bunch of flowers on her jacket. Sometimes they were artificial flowers, but usually they were fragrant violets and roses, or long-stemmed carnations. Even the young men from the East Side had a blossom in their buttonholes and swaggered along, to prove they were at ease in this famous avenue of wealth, with a bit of spring fragrance abloom upon them.

“Now I know why they called it flowering Easter!” said Beth, after she had walked in silence for two blocks, submitting to her uncle’s guidance and watching the strange and famous parade of all sorts of people with eyes that half recognized its significance.

“Who called what flowering Easter, Bethie?” asked Uncle Jim.

“Florida. Don’t you know? Ponce de Leon named it that because he discovered it on Easter. And his name for Easter—the Spanish called it, I mean—‘flowering Easter,’ Pasqua Florida. I guess that’s the way you pronounce it. I never knew why they called it that till to-day. I didn’t know there could be so many flowers all over everything and everybody. It seems as though New York was a greenhouse! I feel like a humming-bird; as if I’d had my beak in flowers till I could hardly breathe!” explained Beth.

"You're a bird all right!" cried Dirk, who had stepped back to ask his father the time and so had heard Beth's speech.

"Easter Monday is a holiday from study. Miss Deland has gone for a three days' visit in the country, as you know," announced Mrs. Cortlandt when she bade Beth good-night. "There is to be an egg hunt through the house to-morrow morning, and in the afternoon I may take you three girls shopping. It is time to get summer clothing under way. We go to Cortmeer about May tenth and the days between Easter and then seem to melt away each year so fast that there's a scurry of preparations at the last, in spite of my resolutions every year to get ready early."

"Aunt Alida, do you think I'm a little dreadful to be so glad I'm going with you to Cortmeer this summer, instead of going home?" asked Beth.

"I think you would be quite dreadful and ungrateful if you weren't," said Aunt Alida decidedly. "When we want you so much and it will be such a happy summer. It's my opinion that you will never be 'at home,' as you call it, long again, Bethie. We've no intention of letting you go."

"It's Aunt Rebecca that makes me feel wicked," said Beth. "She wouldn't say she missed me, but she had me a long time and there's no one else. Even a little girl around is better than no one."

"It seems to me, Beth, that since your great-aunt has consented to your staying and it is settled, the only thing to do is to consider it settled and be happy in the

decision,” said Mrs. Cortlandt, kissing her good-night. “Go to sleep and dream of the flowery Easter ; don’t meditate on your wickedness ! ”

Beth laughed and ran away, ready to act upon this advice.

The family breakfasted together Easter Monday morning. Aunt Alida said that the spring made itself felt most of all in a willingness to cut short the morning nap. Colored eggs and eggs that held small trinkets, as well as candy eggs, had been hidden from one end of the great house to the other. The four young people were going on an egg hunt when breakfast was over.

Riggs brought in a heavy mail that morning, doubled by Easter greetings, arriving a little late.

Mrs. Cortlandt received the bulk of it, but Beth had two letters for her share when they were distributed. She held up a card with flowers, a cross and a chicken skilfully combined in its design. “From Janie,” she explained.

“That’s a card that is sure to sell, Beth,” said Uncle Jim gravely. “It hits everybody on one or another side. There are flowers for the sentimental ; a chicken for the humorous ; a cross for the religious view of Easter. Perhaps your friend Janie is not sure what tastes you have developed this winter.”

“Here’s a letter from Miss Tappan,” said Beth, wondering, and not paying attention to her uncle’s teasing. “She never writes me.”

She opened her letter, for her aunt had set the ex-

ample of looking over the mail at breakfast by opening her own.

Beth read hers with the color coming and going in her face and with a variety of expressions chasing one another, though everybody else was so interested in what had come in the mail that no one noticed Beth.

Finally Natalie looked up from a note which she held, crying:

"Oh, Alys, listen to this! Genevieve Haddon is going to have charades for the Poor Babies' Fund —— Beth, what's the matter?"

"Oh, it's Aunt Rebecca! I knew she wouldn't tell!" cried Beth in a distressed voice.

"Tell what? She isn't dead?" exclaimed Natalie.

"How could she tell that?" said Alys. "Is she sick, Beth?"

"Bad news, dear?" asked Aunt Alida, putting down the letter which she was reading. Uncle Jim, too, folded a large sheet of figures which he was examining and thrust it into his pocket. All eyes turned upon Beth, waiting her explanation.

"If I read it that will be the quickest; it isn't long," said Beth tremulously.

" 'My dear Beth,' " Beth read. " 'I have been thinking of writing you for some time. It is not that I want to, but that I ought to. I do not wish to take other people's business on my shoulders, but silence gives consent and if I am silent I shall give consent to a

wrong. We are told in the Acts that Saul stood by and held the garments of those who stoned Stephen to death and so shared their guilt. Of course I feel that this lesson is for me, because I am a dressmaker, so have to do with garments. Besides, I opened to that chapter when I opened my Bible the other day to get guidance whether to write you or not. So I am writing.

“ ‘Your Aunt Rebecca is not at all well. She is not sick, but it is my opinion that she is pining, and pining is unhealthy, if carried too far. She is lonely, but she would die before saying so. You know it would be exactly like her to die without saying anything about anything which she felt strongly. As long as you prefer the houses of the rich and great to your early home she will bear it as best she can. But she is not a young woman and hot weather is coming. If I were you, Elizabeth, I should feel it my duty to come back and cheer her up. As I said, pining is unhealthy, and it may be a very hot summer, which wears at best.

“ ‘Do as you think best about returning, though you are too young to realize how a person can miss any one, or to decide important questions. Whatever you do, never let on to your great-aunt that I wrote ; she would kill me and never forgive me.

“ ‘Hoping that you will see all that I could not make you see, I remain,

Your true friend,

“ ‘LYDIA TAPPAN.

“‘P. S.—Your cat, Tabby, is well. She has a yellow kitten. You asked to have it saved, if there was one, so your aunt kept it, though you don’t mean to come home.’”

There was silence as Beth folded up her letter with hands that would tremble. She looked around the table, at the faces which she had learned to love so well, with trouble, but no tears in her gentle eyes.

“Oh, well,” said Uncle Jim, shaking off the impression which the letter had made, in spite of its funny phrases and confused thought. “After all your true friend, Lydia Tappan, says your great-aunt is not ill. We knew that she must miss you. You can write this person, who has to do with garments, that it is all settled that you are to stay with us.”

Beth shook her head. “I don’t see how I could, Uncle Jim,” she said.

“Oh, Bethie dear, I’m not sure that it is your duty to return, really, and not wholly selfishly!” cried Aunt Alida. “This may be a friendly exaggeration of your Aunt Rebecca’s natural loneliness. As your uncle says, Miss Tappan states plainly that she is not ill.”

“Say, you don’t mean that you think of going!” cried Dirk, too disgusted to say more.

“You are *not* going and that settles it,” declared Alys.

“You’re ours for keeps, Bethikins, so what’s the use?” added Natalie, disposing of the question once for all.

Beth looked at them imploringly. “I’ve got to go,” she said, and instantly Aunt Alida recognized the immovable decision that lay behind the words and in Beth’s childish face.

“Well, of all ——” began Natalie.

“You can’t go, Beth,” said Mr. Cortlandt at the same moment.

Beth held up the hand that wore the prince’s ring, the insignia of the Order of the Strong Hearted.

“Don’t you remember what we are to do always?” she asked. “We have to choose what we ought to do, not what we want to do. He said that was the meaning of the Order; we promised that when we joined it. I’m the first one who has had to choose anything much since the prince founded the Order. Wouldn’t it be awful if I failed? And wouldn’t you go home, if any one had taken care of you for years and years, all your life, and was pining? Even if you didn’t belong to an Order? It’s dreadful to pine. A girl at home pined so when her mother died that she went into quick consumption and died too. Of course I must go home. I’ll write Miss Tappan not to tell Aunt Rebecca I’m coming; then I’ll surprise her. Probably that’ll do her more good. When can I go, Uncle Jim? You wouldn’t have to send Anna Mary to take me back, would you?”

“Beth, Beth, do you want to go back? You seem impatient to start!” cried Natalie.

Her mother gave her a quick glance, and Beth’s eyes filled with tears.

"Oh, Natalie, don't you know how beautiful I knew Cortmeer would be and the sea? And—don't I love you?" Beth cried.

She did not say, loyal little soul that she was, that life in her old home was utterly different from the life of luxury and beauty surrounding her here. Beth would not have been a human child to have felt no pang in giving up her room, the perfect service, the drives in carriages and cars, all the delights which her uncle's wealth poured upon her. Going back meant leaving fairy-land, in which Beth had dwelt blissfully all winter, for the real life of simplest realities which had been hers. And, as she said, she loved these new-found relatives with all her loving heart.

Aunt Alida came to her rescue. "Do you know, Jim," she said to her husband, who sat regarding Beth thoughtfully, without speaking, "do you know that I think Beth is entirely right to go? I want her very much; she knows that, but I think she is right, in the highest kind of right, to choose to sacrifice herself for the one who has taken care of her all her life. And I know quite well that it is a hard sacrifice to make. But Beth would not be happy if she went to Cortmeer after this. We will help her to make the sacrifice; not make it harder by our protests. We will pack her off in the Pullman car, and Trump in the express for small ponies, and send her on her way, if not precisely rejoicing, yet happy in the knowledge that she has done a hard thing and a dear, sweet sort of right thing, and that she is going to make an old lady very, very glad

by choosing her instead of us. For a time, though, Bethie! Remember you are coming back to us, and another time we shall try to arrange for no more partings!”

Aunt Alida smiled at the little girl, with a warm light in her glorious dark eyes, and Beth smiled back at her bravely, in spite of the tears on her flushed cheeks. These two understood each other. Beth wondered how she should ever bear not seeing that beautiful face, how she should ever be able to wait to hear again that gracious voice, which had come to represent to her the sweetest music in the world, the expression of truest womanhood.

“We’ll do better than you propose, Alida,” said Uncle Jim, while the Cortlandt children sat silent, aghast at this unexpected and adverse settlement of the discussion. “We will ship Trump, as you say, but we will take Beth back ourselves, in our big touring car, and leave her on Miss Bristead’s door-steps—like a foundling!”

“Oh, Uncle Jim!” cried Beth as usual.

And so, swiftly, suddenly, it was settled. Beth was going back. Her Wonder-Winter was over and no Wonder-Summer was to follow it, this year, at least.

It was hard, cruelly hard, yet, just as Aunt Alida had prophesied, already a song was singing in Beth’s heart that she had not failed of her obligations as one of the Order of the Strong of Heart. She had chosen, not what she wanted, but what was right. And poor old lonely, repressed Aunt Rebecca would be glad.

CHAPTER XIX

THE WONDER-WINTER MELTS IN SPRING

HOW changed the house looked to Beth, now that it was settled that she was to leave it ! Only a short half year ago it looked unfamiliar, its grandeurs frightened her. Now it seemed to her like home and the more than simple house of her former life came before her memory like something utterly strange and barren.

She went up the broad stairway between Natalie and Alys silently, slowly ; all three girls were trying not to cry.

“I suppose her mortal life seemed queer to a changeling, too, when she first went back from fairy-land,” Beth said aloud, speaking out of her thoughts.

“We’ll see you after a while,” said Alys, as the three paused at Beth’s door. Her voice drooped downward through the short sentence and ended in melancholy.

“You wouldn’t have thought that Alys would have minded much,” said Beth to herself, as she closed the door of her room behind her.

The fire burned low on the hearth, just a stick or two, charred in the middle, but still in form on the ends, left of Frieda’s early fire which had brightened

the room in the early morning. Even when her first glimpse of this perfect chamber had struck her mute with admiration on her arrival, it had never looked to Beth so utterly delightful as it did that moment when she saw it with farewell to it in her heart.

She crossed over and dropped down in her favorite low white willow rocker beside the hearth. She twisted around, laid her arms over its back, her face down on them and cried as hard, yet as relievingly as she could. A good thorough cry had to be gone through with, so it was well to get it over and done on the spot.

Frieda came in and found Beth thus. She stood terror-stricken, waiting an explanation when Beth could give it.

"Miss Beth, Miss Beth dear? Miss Beth, darling little Miss Beth?" she said questioningly.

"I'm going home, Frieda," sobbed Beth, straightening herself and futilely rolling a perfectly wet ball of handkerchief around in first one, then the other eye. "I've had a letter from—from a neighbor at home, and she tells me my Aunt Rebecca is pining. She never would tell me herself, so I'm sure it's true. Besides, Miss Tappan knows. Of course it would be dreadful to stay here—I mean at Cortmeer—having the loveliest time in the world, while poor Aunt Rebecca pined. Aunt Alida says so, too. So I've got to go—soon. I might have known a wonder-summer couldn't come right after a wonder-winter."

Frieda fetched a dry handkerchief from Beth's drawer, practically expressing the sympathy no words

could convey, nor was it an accident that she offered Beth now her favorite handkerchief.

"Miss Beth, dearest, it's awful; that's what it is. It's awful for me, and Liebchen will be wild when she hears it. You've just crept right into everybody's heart here, Miss Beth, and there won't be a dry eye, from Tim in the stable to the smallest maid below stairs, when you start. But you'll be back in the fall. They'll never let you stay away. So try not to feel too bad. If you please, let me tell you that it's fine and just like you to go because you think some one needs you." Frieda smiled affectionately at Beth, with tears in her own eyes.

Beth arose slowly, feeling better. "That isn't one bit finer than it is not to take some one's silver spoons, Frieda," she said. "It would be taking what didn't belong to me if I took Cortmeer this summer and left Aunt Rebecca to pine—at her age, after bringing me up!"

Anna Mary, in the doorway, exchanged smiles with Frieda at this speech.

"So it would, Miss Beth; it's right you are, but it's something to be right!" she said. "I just stopped in one minyute, hearin' the news and bein' downright sorry to hear it. But I'm thinkin' it may be better for you than you think, spendin' this summer back where I fetched you from; a mixture won't hurt you, little dear though you are! Your cousins are cryin' in their room. Sure, you must all cheer up; summer does be swift passin'. Mrs. Cortlandt bade me say to you she

would like you to be ready to go shoppin' in half an hour. She is goin' to get your summer wardrobe, Miss Beth, and there's no better thing to dry female tears, be they from young or old eyes, than a pretty frock or two. It beats all the wisdom of the ancients and the consolation of friends."

Beth laughed. Her sense of humor could not be dampened down long by crying.

"I don't need a summer wardrobe at home, Anna Mary," she said. "Some chambrays and a dimity for afternoons, and a real simple, fine white frock for best—that's all you need there."

"Well, Miss Beth," said Anna Mary, "Mrs. Cortlandt is that sorry about losin' you, and the disappointment and all, that I'm thinkin' she'll have to buy a good deal more than that for you to console herself."

In the car, on the way to the shops, which were even more bewildering in their spring glories than when Beth had first seen them, Beth repeated to Aunt Alida her statement of the simplicity of her requirements in clothing for a summer in her old home.

Aunt Alida smiled at her. "I won't be extravagant, Bethie; I'll promise it! You must let me get you a third of what you would have had at Cortmeer and that third is longer than your list," she said. "What about your little friend, Janie? Is she the sort of child—rather are her people the sort of people who would be displeased if you brought her a few pretty summer concoctions to wear, so that you and she would be dressed in the same way this summer?"

"Do you mean my little friend Janie, or my friend, Janie Little, Aunt Alida?" asked Beth with her merry twinkle returning. "The Littles are nice, Aunt Alida; they are not rich, but they are nice people, looked-up to, you know—about like us. Nobody is rich at home, but the Littles are among the nice people. They—I don't know. Nobody ever tried to give us dresses. Maybe Janie could have one—or two. I suppose jewelry is safer, but I'm sure I don't know why."

When this shopping expedition was over Aunt Alida had chosen two delicate white frocks of the finest material and designs for Beth to give Janie. For Beth herself there were half a dozen white frocks, ten chambrays, some delicate mulls and organdies in colors, a hat for best, a shade hat that Beth thought still prettier, low shoes in russets, browns and black; stockings, gloves, a parasol that awoke in Beth enthusiasm only just short of adoration, seeing which Aunt Alida added one like it, in another color, for Janie.

"Aunt Alida, you don't know, you really don't begin to know what Aunt Rebecca will say when she sees all these things for no one but just me! It won't be what she says in words; it will be what she'll say with her eyes and especially with her back; turning it, you know!" cried Beth. "And only think what there is in the house already that you've bought for me! Why, I'll never dare take back all the trunks these things will need!"

"I do not intend you to, Bethie," said Aunt Alida. "Your winter clothing will be put away in your ward-

robes till you get back. That will be six months from now ; in October, surely."

Beth began to feel cheered. Anna Mary's wisdom was profound ; shopping, pretty clothes do work wonders in drying feminine tears !

It was impossible not to look forward to the long drive in the big touring car which Beth had never seen ; it was resting for the winter. It was also impossible not to feel some interest in the yellow kitten which she had so long wanted and which Miss Tappan said was waiting for her. And, though she regretted Natalie, Alys and Dirk, still more the dear uncle who had given her her first actual knowledge of what a father would have been like, and the beautiful and adorable Aunt Alida, who was a combination of mother and goddess to the little girl, still Janie was dear, and of course she loved Aunt Rebecca, and it would be nice to see the dull little shops, the quiet streets of home once more. So, like a healthy, natural little girl, Beth began to see streaks of sunshine through her clouds ; to enjoy amid her regret.

"I'm having the car made ready, Beth," said Uncle Jim one night at dinner, ten days later. "I've been inquiring and I learn that the roads are pretty well settled on the route we shall travel, returning you. I have a directors' meeting, which I can't cut, on April twentieth. I must be back for that. What about the date for the trip, Alida ? When shall we start for Massachusetts ?"

"That's for you to decide, Jim," replied Aunt Alida.

"I've not made any positive engagements, thinking you might go soon. The first of the week?"

"I had Tuesday in mind," said Uncle Jim.

"Tuesday be it," said Aunt Alida promptly. "We are all ready—at least we are all ready to get ready!"

"Now I know you're really going!" cried Dirk, his reddened cheeks betraying how ill he liked the knowledge. "As long as there wasn't a date, it didn't seem true, but now—it does!"

"What shall we do to give you a good time before you go?" asked Natalie. "This is Friday—do you want the Tanagers and Bluebirds and a little spread on Monday, or a dance that night, or—what would you like to do, Beth?"

"I wouldn't like to do one single thing with any one outside this house, except Miss Deland and Mr. Leonard," said Beth. "I'd like to keep right close together, all of us, no one else, my last day." Beth choked over these two final melancholy words.

"Let's have a house party!" cried Alys inspired. "That means a party of the house, or it does this time. Let's have ice-cream and cake in the music room, or the gym or somewhere and have a nice little send off of our own to-morrow afternoon. Shall we?"

"Have Beth's Liebchen and Annunciata here, though; they're so especially Beth's, and let Tim come and have all the servants in, make it like the English story-books, when all the retainers drink the young heir's health!" cried Natalie.

"Is that a go, mumsy?" asked Dirk.

"Isn't it a sort of introduction to a go? To Beth's going?" suggested Mrs. Cortlandt. "Surely I agree to the house party, if Beth likes it."

"It will be very nice, if I don't cry at it," said Beth.

"Nobody cries when they're going somewhere just for the summer, Beth, and that's all the leave of absence from here we'll give you," said Uncle Jim.

It was a queer party which gathered in the music room to bid Beth a formal farewell. Tim, Liebchen, Annunciata were the only guests from outside the house, unless Miss Deland and Mr. Leonard were counted outsiders, but, as Dirk said, "they were inside so much it was about the same thing."

For the rest, all Aunt Alida's servants were asked to "drink Beth's health in ice-cream juice, if it melts," Alys said.

Tim arose and made a speech. "Miss Beth, you dear child," he began, and the audience shouted: "Hear, hear!" endorsing this estimate of Beth before he could get farther. "It's sorry we are to be seein' the last of you, as the man said to the thrain he'd run himself purple to catch whin he saw it turnin' the corner, beyant the station. Trump is startin' this day week to go afther you an' it's envyin' Trump we'll all be whin he gets there, more by token that you'll likely throw your two arrums around him an' kiss him plenty, which is what no Shetland pony can appreciate fully. Take it all in all, Miss Beth, high an' low in your uncle's house, an' more, maybe, in your uncle's stable, have come to love the sweet face of you this winter,

an' it's just walkin' rolls of crêpe we'd be didn't we know you'd be here again next season. So we wish you good luck, Miss Beth, darlin', an' I'm thinkin' there's no better way to end a farewell speech than to say Godspeed, which is all wan with God bless you!"

This speech, which Tim ended with a bow that would have done credit to a dancing master, was applauded to the echo.

"You have to reply, Bethie," whispered Uncle Jim, pulling Beth to her feet with a whirl. She laughed, but looked frightened, although all the faces before her were familiar ones, which smiled at her with affectionate looks.

They saw a round-faced little girl, crimson with embarrassment, dark blue eyes dilated and excited, smiling, tremulous lips, fair hair flowing around her shoulders, snowy white floating frock making her look especially innocent and childish. It came to one or two present, notably to Aunt Alida and Anna Mary, that this child had come into her uncle's household for more than her own sake and to spend a "wonder-winter" in the enjoyment of all that great wealth can give.

She was a simple little girl, wholly unconscious and modest, but there was in her a quality, a nobility of mind and heart, which made those who loved Beth feel that it held the promise, the assurance of a future of important achievement.

"I can't make a speech; Tim's speech was lovely," said Beth in a little voice and they all applauded, choos-

ing to consider this the opening of a speech. So Beth found herself launched, which was Uncle Jim's intention when he led the applause.

"I've had the nicest winter ever was," Beth went on. "It's been just like a fairy story. It's gone right on from glory to glory. I've had a wonder-winter, in Wonderland. I'm fearfully, fearfully sorry I've got to go, but Aunt Alida and Uncle Jim are going to ask me again, they say, so maybe I'll come back—if my great-aunt Rebecca can get along. Everybody has been so good to me, everybody! I'm—I'm just as obliged as I can be. I hope everybody will keep well this summer and be here, if I do come back. And—and—I'm really ever so much obliged."

Beth broke down a little at the end of this first attempt at public speaking. The applause, as newspapers say, reporting political meetings, "was tremendous."

Then every one in the room came up to Beth and made her a little gift; every one, even to the cook, a forbidding man whom Beth did not know and the woman who helped him, whom she had never seen before. Stories of Beth's sweetness, her friendliness, her desire to make every one around her happy had stolen to the unknown parts of the house and to those who presided there, and all were sorry that the dear little girl was going away.

Riggs was the greatest surprise of all. His solemnity seemed like a case, through which nothing could penetrate. It was a pleasant shock to discover that Beth

had broken through this armor of respectability and won affection from the butler. Riggs came with his farewell offering to Beth and presented it with a smile and real feeling.

"Hit's a bit of 'awthorn from Stratford-on-Avon, miss," Riggs said. "Hi thought you'd like something from Shakespeare's 'ome. Hi've 'eard you talkin' hinterested hand hinterestingly hon readin'. Hi made bold to send hover to a member hof my hown family, 'oo keeps an hinn near Stratford-on-Avon, for this bit of 'awthorn. Haccept hit, Miss Beth, hif you please, hin token hof my hadmiration hand respect."

Mr. Leonard gave Beth a tiny packet. "We're like minded, Riggs and I; thought you'd like something with venerable associations, Beth! That's a piece of the British man-of-war, *Somerset*. The ship Paul Revere rowed under 'with muffled oar' when he was making for the Charlestown shore to arouse the Lexington men. The *Somerset* went to pieces on the Cape Cod shore a few years later and was uncovered long afterward. This little piece of black English oak was part of her. I thought you'd like it."

Beth lightly touched the dried hawthorn leaves, the square of oak, blackened by time. Her imagination was fired by the contact of her pink-tipped, twentieth century fingers with these objects which had been near such great deeds, such reverend associations. She could hardly bring herself back to thank Mr. Leonard and Riggs.

"We'll meet again, little Beth," said Mr. Leonard.

"If I did not know that I should not know how to say good-bye."

"You saved Dirk's life," said Beth. "But I was fond of you before."

Which was a satisfactory good-bye, as Mr. Leonard's eyes betrayed.

Annunciata's offering to Beth, made with tempestuous sobs, for Annunciata never felt anything by halves, was a pretty and gay striped apron, such as Italian peasants wear.

"It's for curious-a-tee," explained Annunciata, between gasps. "And for to remember your poor Nunciata, who will died, die, dead without to see you, loveliest!"

"Now, Beth, this is the most serious case of all!" whispered Natalie. "It's dreadful to kill the child in so many ways."

Liebchen was quiet; she did not even cry, but she looked tragic as she bade Beth good-bye and presented her with wristlets of her own knitting.

"I'll walk where you go, if you don't come back," she said. "You got me cured to walk, and I'll walk there, but I'll see you again."

Beth found this touching. She promised Liebchen faithfully that she would return. She then made "her international relations peaceful," as Uncle Jim said, by putting on the gay contadina's apron and the wristlets, in spite of the delicacy of her white frock. Beth served her guests with cream and cake, Natalie played and so did Aunt Alida, and everybody sang.

When Mr. Cortlandt insisted upon it, Tim danced his Irish breakdown with the greatest humor and flexibility, ending with a toss in the air of an imaginary cap and a shout of "Erin go bragh" that sent Dirk into ecstasy.

That night Aunt Alida and Uncle Jim had no engagement, for the household was to rise at the unusual hour of half-past six, for the travelers to be off before nine.

Frieda dressed Beth for the last time, at least for a good while. It was a sober and dewy face that looked back at Beth from the glass, as she sat before it, having her hair braided tight for the drive, and behind her chair Frieda bent over her, braiding and dropping tears on the fair hair.

Beth did not speak, neither did Frieda. Both understood that the little lady and her maid were too saddened by parting to speak of it.

When her toilet was made, hair tucked away under the dearest little automobile bonnet that could be devised for such a face as Beth's, a close little affair of white straw with a flat blue bow on its top and small pink rosebuds all around the inside of the edge, Frieda put on Beth a long coat of blue, gauntlet gloves, a white veil that was sure to flow out gracefully into everybody else's face.

Then Beth stood in the middle of her beloved room and let her eyes travel from one object to another in it, taking detailed farewell of its perfections. Such a beautiful room, so homelike, yet so elegant! And she was giving it up! Beth choked, but remembered that

Aunt Rebecca was pining. She turned to Frieda and threw her arms around her vehemently.

“Good-bye, good-bye, you dear, nice Frieda! I’m sorry if I ever bothered you. You’ve been so nice I’ve even liked having a maid, though I’d never have believed I could have borne it. Good-bye!”

“Good-bye, my darling little Miss Beth,” sobbed Frieda. “You’ve never been anything like a bother to me; just a pleasure to wait on you, it is. Come back, and don’t let any one else be your maid when you come.”

“Oh, mercy me, no!” cried Beth, hurrying away before she should feel that she could not go from her room and Frieda.

At the door stood the great touring car which Beth had never seen before. It was painted a dark mulberry color, to correspond with the Cortlandt livery. Léon Charette was in his place, ready to start. Beside him sat the footman who accompanied the coachmen when the horses were used, both in their mulberry coats, looking exceedingly correct. Anna Mary was still stowing away luggage and luncheon hampers in their places in the car. Alys made Beth get into it with her to be shown the thermos bottles, the mirror, the toilet case, all the appointments of this truly magnificent car.

“I thought all the stunning me was done,” said Beth. “But this car is just as wonderful as the house.”

She jumped out and ran back, for there was Miss Deland, smiling, with a book in her hand. “I ordered

this for you, but it had not come yesterday, little Beth," she said.

Beth looked at it ; it was a beautiful copy of old Mal-lory's " Morte d'Arthur."

" Because you are such a little bundle of olden time romance," smiled Miss Deland. " Good-bye, little pupil, and don't forget to love the teacher that never had a chance to teach you much ; you've been such a butterfly in New York this winter ! "

Aunt Alida wore brown ; her long coat, close bonnet and veil and gloves were almost one in color with her dark eyes and hair.

Natalie wore invisible green, Alys a lighter shade, Dirk looked almost professional in Norfolk tweeds and goggles, a small but close imitation of his handsome father. Anna Mary was to be taken ; she looked just as she had when she had come for Beth, a long, severe shiny figure in black.

Mrs. Cortlandt and the three girls were to sit in the back ; Mr. Cortlandt, Dirk and Anna Mary were occupants of the middle seats.

Léon started the car ; it obeyed readily, and slowly rolled away. Beth looked back. There were dear Mrs. Hodgman, who had cried when she kissed Beth good-bye and said : " Good-bye, little sunshine ! " And there were Frieda, Miss Deland—and the house. Beth waved to them all, equally, and was gone !

It was a long drive to the small town where Aunt Rebecca lived, but Mr. Cortlandt was to take it easily. Beth found it thrilling to say : " Now we are in New

York State.” “Now we have crossed the Connecticut line.” It seemed a great thing to her to be an interstate traveler !

The party stopped for the night at a good hotel and Beth keenly enjoyed the novelty. Never before had she been a guest in a hotel ; she had a sense of rapidly becoming a citizen of the great world.

In the morning they took their places in the car again and rolled on, through country so beautiful that Beth could not contain herself.

“New England is lovely, isn’t it, Uncle Jim ?” she said proudly. “‘Land of the Pilgrims’ pride,’ you know. I’m proud of it, too. I can’t help being glad I was born here.”

“I’m truly thankful that you were born somewhere, Bethikins,” returned Uncle Jim. “It’s a fine old state, your Bay State. But ‘breathes there a man with soul so dead,’ you know, Bethie ! You don’t ?” he added, as Beth shook her head. “‘Who never to himself hath said : This is my own, my native land,’ is the rest of the quotation—Scott. And that applies to a little girl. There’s a flavor in the air we first breathed that we ‘may search through the wide world is ne’er met with elsewhere.’ I seem to be dropping into poetry like Silas Wegg ! I’d better stop talking.”

Beth chattered all the way, until they drew near to their destination. Then she became quiet and, as the approach to her town began to take on familiar aspects, to grow pale and tremulous. Her hand sought Aunt Alida’s, who held it fast. It surprised herself to find

how much she wished to hold it fast, permanently : never to let little Beth slip away from her.

It was a perfect April afternoon, warm, with openings in the warmth of spring coolness ; curious little draughts of cool air, followed by warm ones as they skirted woodlands. The sun lay on the earth with a warmth that was a summons to all the flowers. Beth knew that in a day or two she and Janie would gather violets in the south field, back of Janie's house.

The car rolled into the town, more properly a village, with its easy motion that had been so steady and restful all through the journey. It attracted attention ; it was a more magnificent car than usually came that way and it was one of the first to come that season. Beth sat up straight, leaning forward ; by this time her left hand had sought Natalie's, as her right had sought her aunt's, and she was holding fast to them both, with a nervous clutch that betrayed her excitement.

They passed people whom Beth knew, but they did not recognize her. Miss Tappan had kept the secret of her coming, so no one looked to see little Beth Bristead in the great tonneau, behind the impressive mulberry backs of the chauffeur and footman. Beth felt unreasonably disappointed. It seemed dreadful to have Mrs. Damon, who sold them butter, and Mr. Ranney, who might be called Aunt Rebecca's lifelong grocer, go by without a smile for the child who had so often been sent to them on errands.

At last, guided by Beth, the car turned into a shady street, with houses on either side somewhat withdrawn

from it. It stopped at a brown house with a low gateway. The footman jumped down and opened the door of the tonneau.

"I think you'd better go in alone, dear," said Aunt Alida. "Your great-aunt will be so surprised it is better for her to see you before we meet her."

But precaution was too late. Aunt Rebecca came out on the piazza, seeing the car at her gate. Beth sprang out of the tonneau at the sight of her, forgetting everything but that this was coming home again and that was Aunt Rebecca, Aunt Rebecca, looking pale and considerably older, just as Miss Tappan had said.

"Aunt Rebecca, I'm here!" cried Beth, running up the walk.

Aunt Rebecca's hand went to her side. Then she descended a step and caught Beth to her in an embrace such as Beth had never before in all her life received from her.

"Beth, Beth, little Beth," she said; nothing more. But instantly Beth's regrets at returning vanished completely. Aunt Rebecca surely loved her and wanted her; she must have been "pining" to speak, to clutch Beth like this.

Miss Bristead was not the sort of person to allow emotion to master her. In an instant she had regained her self-control and went down to her gate to meet Mrs. Cortlandt and her husband and to urge them to come in.

"We are going on to-night, Miss Bristead, thank

you," said Aunt Alida. "Mr. Cortlandt has an important engagement that will force us to hasten back. We have returned Beth to you. It is with unspeakable reluctance. We want her dreadfully this summer, Miss Bristead! I think it right to tell you that we have begged Beth to stay with us, but all in vain. She has been resolutely determined to go to you. We are sorry enough, but—here she is!"

Miss Bristead smiled. "I think I need her more than you do, with these three fine children," she said.

Beth recognized in Aunt Rebecca a changed manner, a softening. Once she would not have complimented the young Cortlandts.

"Aren't you going to come in, Aunt Alida?" cried Beth aghast.

"No, dear. It is better that we go immediately," said Aunt Alida. She was wise enough to know that parting would thus be easier to Beth.

"Get in again, chicken, and kiss me as hard as you can, to make up for all the days that must pass before you kiss me again," her uncle ordered her.

Beth got in. For a few moments she was hugged breathless by first one then another of her Cortlandt relatives, and then they began all over again. Even Anna Mary kissed her over and over, and blessed her fervently.

Then Uncle Jim got out and lifted Beth bodily from the car. He looked at Miss Bristead and smiled, then put Beth's hands in hers, in token of his renunciation of her for a while. Then the great car moved, turned,

slowly started away, amid shouts of farewell and a sob or two from Natalie and Alys. It went down the quiet street, increasing its speed and, turning the corner, was lost to sight.

Beth turned to the house, knowing that she must do something to keep from crying. She did not wish to let Aunt Rebecca feel that she regretted being at home again.

"You made a sacrifice for me, child; they are much more charming, high-bred people than I expected to see. They are very nice indeed, for New Yorkers. They could have given you a great deal we lack here, Beth. I appreciate your coming, but—I needed you!"

"I'm truly glad I came, Aunt Rebecca," said Beth with perfect truth.

Together they went into the house. It looked bare, queer. The china ornaments on the mantelpiece, the clock with Time and his scythe, once so familiar, had become not only strange to Beth, but grotesque. Nothing seemed real; neither the life she had been living, nor this old life she had lived before.

Ella Lowndes, who had been watching the arrival behind a drawn curtain, came to meet and hug Beth. Tabby came, too, her tail erect, her whole air revealing pride in the yellow kitten that gamboled behind her, trying to reach her proud tail.

In a little while Janie came running, breathless, wild with joy. News travels fast in places like Aunt Rebecca's village. Janie had heard that Beth Bristead was back. The little girls hugged each other in a

transport of joy in meeting. However dear and beautiful Natalie was, Janie was Beth's lifelong chum; there really could be but one Janie! Beth was so glad to see her that it made her forget the red table-cloth which had been distressing her in a vague way. Later Beth and Janie sat on the upper step in the April sunset, their arms around each other, their heads leaned lovingly close.

"Tell me all about everything," Janie ordered Beth.

"Not to-night; I can't. It seems so queer to be here, yet it doesn't seem as if New York was true, one bit. I feel as though I had been dreaming," Beth said.

"Beth, I don't see how you ever, ever came back!" whispered Janie. "Lydia Tappan told mama to-day that she had written you; that was after we heard you had come, though."

"I had to come. You see this ring? That shows I'm not dreaming. A prince gave me that." She nodded hard, in response to Janie's amazed stare.

"Truly; a real prince! It's for an Order. Natalie, Alys, Dirk and I belong. It's the Order of the Strong Hearted. When we have to choose something, we're vowed to choose what's right, not what we want—unless we happen to want the right. I had to choose to come back. But, oh, Janie, I'm awfully, dreadfully glad to see you!"

"Well, I guess I am!" echoed Janie. They hugged each other all over again.

"Sitting here like Java sparrows?" said Aunt Rebecca coming out. "Put this shawl around you. I

guess it'll cover you both, sitting so close! I declare, it doesn't seem as though it could be you, Beth! Your wonder-winter is over, as you called it. But I guess I could quote Shakespeare if I had a mind to: 'Now is the winter of our discontent made glorious summer by the son of York.' Only it's a little daughter! Are you really home again, Beth?"

"Yes, Aunt Rebecca, I'm home again! I'm so glad you're glad I came! You *are* glad, aren't you, Aunt Rebecca?" asked Beth.

"Yes, Beth, I'm glad," said Aunt Rebecca. "I like to have you around."

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